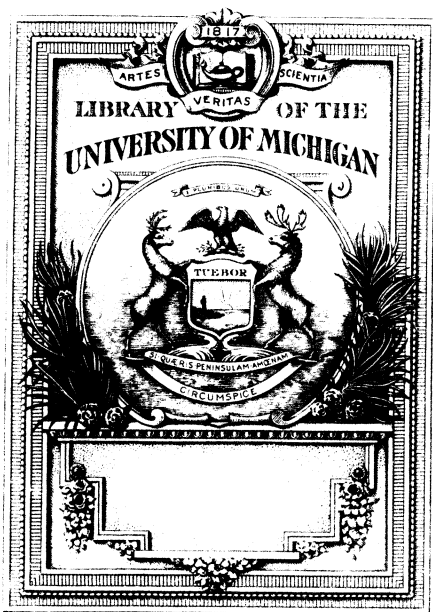


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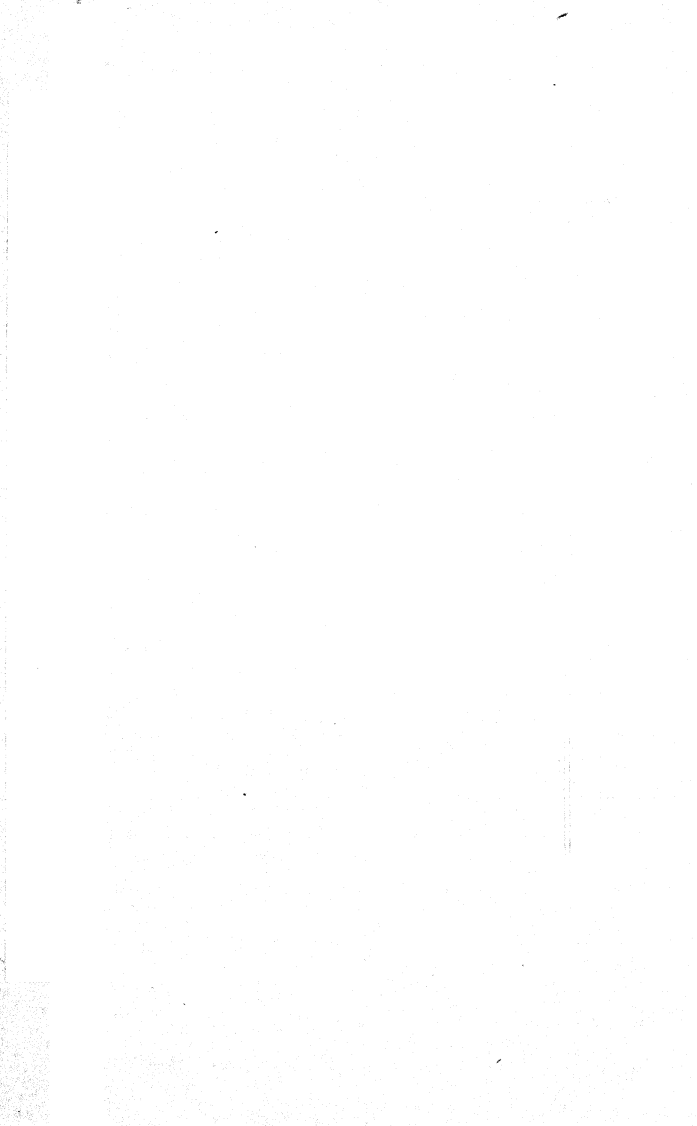
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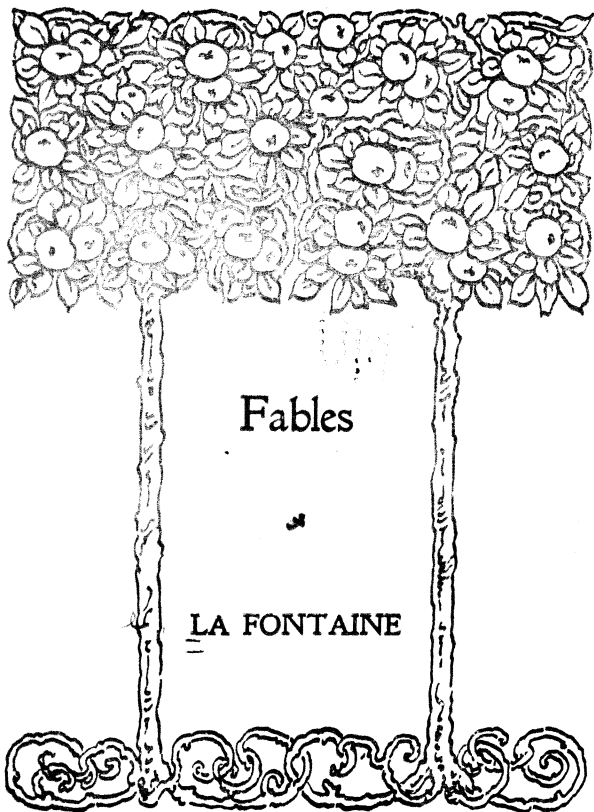
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Fables

LA FONTAINE

H. M. CALDWELL CO., PUBLISHERS
NEW YORK AND BOSTON

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THE
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PREFACE

TO THE PRESENT EDITION,

WITH SOME ACCOUNT OF THE TRANSLATOR.

THE first edition of this translation of La Fontaine's Fables appeared in Boston, U. S., in 1841. It achieved a considerable success, and six editions were printed in three years. Since then it has been allowed to pass out of print, except in the shape of a small-type edition produced in London immediately after the first publication in Boston; and the present publishers have thought that a reprint in a readable yet popular form would be generally acceptable.

The translator has remarked, in the 'Advertisement' to his original edition (which follows these pages), on the singular neglect of La Fontaine by English translators up to the time of his own work. Forty years have elapsed since those remarks were penned, yet translations into English of the *complete*

Fables of the chief among modern fabulists are almost as few in number as they were then. Mr. George Ticknor (the author of the 'History of Spanish Literature,' etc.), in praising Mr. Wright's translation when it first appeared, said La Fontaine's was 'a book till now untranslated;' and since Mr. Wright so happily accomplished his self-imposed task, there has been but one other complete translation, viz., that of the late Mr. Walter Thornbury. This latter, however, seems to have been undertaken chiefly with a view to supplying the necessary accompaniment to the English issue of M. Doré's well-known designs for the Fables (first published as illustrations to a Paris edition); and existing as it does only in the large quarto form given to those illustrations, it cannot make any claim to be a handy-volume edition.

Mr. Wright's translation, however, still holds its place as the best English version, and the present reprint, besides having undergone careful revision, embodies the corrections (but not the expurgations) of the sixth edition, which differed from those preceding it. The notes, too, have, for the most part, been added by the reviser.

Some account of the translator, who is still one of the living notables of his nation, may not be out of place here. Elizur Wright, Junior, is the son of Elizur Wright, who published some papers in math-

ematics, but was principally engaged in agricultural pursuits at Canaan, Litchfield County, Connecticut, U. S. The younger Elizur Wright was born at Canaan in 1804. He graduated at Yale College in 1826, and afterwards taught in a school at Groton. In 1829, he became Professor of Mathematics in Hudson College, from which post he went to New York in 1833, on being appointed secretary to the American Anti-Slavery Society. In 1838 he removed to the literary centre of the United States, Boston, where he edited several papers successfully, and where he published his 'La Fontaine;' which thus, while it still remains his most considerable work, was also one of his earliest. How he was led to undertake it, he has himself narrated in the Advertisement to his first edition. But previously to 1841, the date of the first publication of the complete 'Fables,' he tried the effect of a partial publication. In 1839 he published, anonymously, a little 12mo volume, 'La Fontaine: A Present for the Young.' This, as appears from the title, was a book for children; and though the substance of these few (and simpler) fables may be traced in the later and complete edition, the latter shows a considerable improvement upon the work of his 'prentice hand.' The complete work was published, as we have said, in 1841. It appeared in an expensive and sumptuous form, and was adorned with the

French artist Grandville's illustrations, which had first appeared only two years previously in the Paris edition of La Fontaine's Fables, published by Fournier Aîné. The book was well received both in America and England, and four other editions were speedily called for. The sixth edition, published in 1843, was a slightly expurgated one, designed for schools. The expurgation, however, almost wholly consisted of the omission bodily of five of the fables, whose places were, as Mr. Wright stated in his preface, filled by six original fables of his own. From his 'Notice,' affixed to this sixth edition, it seems evident that he by no means relished the task, usually a hateful one, of expurgating his author. Having, however, been urged to the task by 'criticisms both friendly and unfriendly' (as he says), he did it; and did it wisely, because sparingly. But in his prefatory words he in a measure protests. He says: 'In this age, distinguished for almost everything more than sincerity, there are some people who would seem too delicate and refined to read their Bibles.' And he concludes with the appeal: 'But the unsophisticated lovers of *nature*, who have not had the opportunity to acquaint themselves with the French language, I have no doubt will thank me for interpreting to them these honest and truthful fictions of the frank old JEAN, and will beg me to proceed no farther in the work of expurgation.' The

first of the substituted fables of the sixth edition — *The Fly and the Game*, given below — may also be viewed as a protest to the same purpose. As a specimen of Mr. Wright's powers at once as an original poet and an original fabulist, we here print (for the first time in England, we believe) the substituted fables of his sixth edition. We may add that they appeared in lieu of the following five fables as given in Mr. Wright's complete edition, and in the present edition: *The Bitch and her Friend*, *The Mountain in Labour*, *The Young Widow*, *The Women and the Secret*, and *The Husband, the Wife, and the Thief*. It should also be borne in mind that these original fables were inserted in an edition professedly meant for schools rather than for the general public.

THE FLY AND THE GAME.

A KNIGHT of powder-horn and shot
Once filled his bag — as I would not,
Unless the feelings of my breast
By poverty were sorely pressed —
With birds and squirrels for the spits
Of certain gormandizing cits.
With merry heart the fellow went
Direct to Mr. Centpercent,
Who loved, as well was understood,
Whatever game was nice and good.

This gentleman, with knowing air,
Surveyed the dainty lot with care,
Pronounced it racy, rich, and rare,
And called his wife, to know her wishes
About its purchase for their dishes.
The lady thought the creatures prime,
And for their dinner just in time;
So sweet they were, and delicate,
For dinner she could hardly wait.
But now there came — could luck be worse? —
Just as the buyer drew his purse,
A bulky fly, with solemn buzz,
And smelt, as an inspector does,
This bird and that, and said the meat —
But here his words I won't repeat —
Was anything but fit to eat.
'Ah!' cried the lady, 'there's a fly
I never knew to tell a lie;
His coat, you see, is bottle-green;
He knows a thing or two, I ween.
My dear, I beg you, do not buy;
Such game as this may suit the dogs.'
So on our peddling sportsman jogs,
His soul possessed of this surmise,
About some men, as well as flies:
A filthy taint they soonest find
Who are to relish filth inclined.

THE DOG AND CAT.

A DOG and cat, messmates for life,
Were often falling into strife,
Which came to scratching, growls, and snaps,
And spitting in the face, perhaps.
A neighbour dog once chanced to call
Just at the outset of their brawl,
And, thinking Tray was cross and cruel,
To snarl so sharp at Mrs. Mew-well,
Growled rather roughly in his ear.
'And who are you to interfere?'
Exclaimed the cat, while in his face she flew;
And, as was wise, he suddenly withdrew.

It seems, in spite of all his snarling,
And hers, that Tray was still her darling.

THE GOLDEN PITCHER.

A FATHER once, whose sons were two,
For each a gift had much ado.
At last upon this course he fell:
'My sons,' said he, 'within our well
Two treasures lodge, as I am told:
The one a sunken piece of gold,—
A bowl it may be, or a pitcher;
The other is a thing far richer.
These treasures if you can but find,
Each may be suited to his mind;
For both are precious in their kind.

To gain the one you 'll need a hook ;
The other will but cost a look.
But oh, of this, I pray, beware !
You who may choose the tempting share,
Too eager fishing for the pitcher
May ruin that which is far richer.'

Out ran the boys, their gifts to draw ;
But eagerness was checked with awe.
How could there be a richer prize
Than solid gold beneath the skies ?
Or, if there could, how could it dwell
Within their own old mossy well ? —
Were questions which excited wonder,
And kept their headlong av'rice under.
The golden cup each feared to choose,
Lest he the better gift should lose ;
And so resolved our prudent pair,
The gifts in common they would share
The well was open to the sky.
As o'er its curb they keenly pry,
It seems a tunnel piercing through,
From sky to sky, from blue to blue ;
And, at its nether mouth, each sees
A brace of their antipodes,
With earnest faces peering up,
As if themselves might seek the cup.
'Ha!' said the elder, with a laugh,
'We need not share it by the half.
The mystery is clear to me :
That richer gift to all is free.

Be only as that water true,
And then the whole belongs to you.'

That truth itself was worth so much,
It cannot be supposed that such
A pair of lads were satisfied ;
And yet they were before they died.
But whether they fished up the gold,
I 'm sure I never have been told.
Thus much they learned, I take for granted, —
And that was what their father wanted. . . .
If truth for wealth we sacrifice,
We throw away the richer prize.

PARTY STRIFE.

AMONG the beasts a feud arose.
The lion, as the story goes,
Once on a time laid down
His sceptre and his crown ;
And in his stead the beasts elected,
As often as it suited them,
A sort of king *pro tem.*, —
Some animal they much respected.
At first they all concurred.
The horse, the stag, the unicorn,
Were chosen each in turn ;
And then the noble bird
That looks undazzled at the sun.
But party strife began to run
Through burrow, den, and herd.

Some beasts proposed the patient ox,
And others named the cunning fox.
The quarrel came to bites and knocks;
Nor was it duly settled
Till many a beast high-mettled
Had bought an aching head,
Or, possibly, had bled.

The fox, as one might well suppose,
At last above his rival rose ;
But, truth to say, his reign was bootless,
Of honour being rather fruitless.

All prudent beasts began to see
The throne a certain charm had lost,
And, won by strife, as it must be,
Was hardly worth the pains it cost.
So when his majesty retired,
Few worthy beasts his seat desired.
Especially now stood aloof
The wise of head, the swift of hoof,
The beasts whose breasts were battle-proof.
It consequently came to pass,
Not first, but, as we say, in fine,
For king the creatures chose the ass, —
He, for prime minister the swine.

'T is thus that party spirit
Is prone to banish merit.

THE CAT AND THE THRUSH.

A THRUSH that sang one rustic ode
Once made a garden his abode,
And gave the owner such delight,
He grew a special favourite.
Indeed, his landlord did his best
To make him safe from every foe ;
The ground about his lowly nest
Was undisturbed by spade or hoe.
And yet his song was still the same ;
It even grew somewhat more tame.
At length Grimalkin spied the pet,
Resolved that he should suffer yet,
And laid his plan of devastation
So as to save his reputation ;
For, in the house, from looks demure
He passed for honest, kind, and pure.
Professing search of mice and moles,
He through the garden daily strolls,
And never seeks our thrush to catch ;
But when his consort comes to hatch,
Just eats the young ones in a batch.
The sadness of the pair bereaved
Their generous guardian sorely grieved.
But yet it could not be believed
His faithful cat was in the wrong,
Though so the thrush said in his song.
The cat was therefore favoured still
To walk the garden at his will ;

And hence the birds, to shun the pest,
 Upon a pear-tree built their nest.
 Though there it cost them vastly more,
 'T was vastly better than before.
 And Gaffer Thrush directly found
 His throat, when raised above the ground,
 Gave forth a softer, sweeter sound.
 New tunes, moreover, he had caught,
 By perils and afflictions taught,
 And found new things to sing about:
 New scenes had brought new talents out.
 So, while, improved beyond a doubt,
 His own old song more clearly rang,
 Far better than themselves he sang
 The chants and trills of other birds;
 He even mocked Grimalkin's words
 With such delightful humour that
 He gained the Christian name of Cat.

Let Genius tell, in verse and prose,
 How much to praise and friends it owes.
 Good sense may be, as I suppose,
 As much indebted to its foes.

In 1844 Mr. Wright wrote the Preface to the first collected edition of the works of the poet J. G. Whittier; and soon after he seems to have become completely absorbed in politics, and in the mighty anti-slavery struggle, which constituted the greater part of the politics of the United States in those and

many succeeding years. He became a journalist in the anti-slavery cause; and in 1850 he wrote a trenchant answer to Mr. Carlyle's then just published 'Latter Day Pamphlets.' Later on, slavery having been at length abolished, he appeared as a writer in yet another field, publishing several works, one as lately as 1877, on life-assurance.

LONDON, 1881.





ADVERTISEMENT

TO THE FIRST EDITION OF THIS TRANSLATION.

[BOSTON, U.S.A., 1841.]

FOUR years ago I dropped into Charles de Behr's repository of foreign books, in Broadway, New York, and there, for the first time, saw La Fontaine's Fables. It was a cheap copy, adorned with some two hundred woodcuts, which, by their worn appearance, betokened an extensive manufacture. I became a purchaser, and gave the book to my little boy, then just beginning to feel the intellectual magnetism of pictures. In the course of the next year, he frequently tasked my imperfect knowledge of French for the story which belonged to some favourite vignette. This led me to inquire whether any English version existed; and, not finding any, I resolved, though quite unused to literary exercises of the sort, to cheat sleep of an hour every morning till there should be one. The result is before you. If in this I have wronged La Fontaine, I hope the best-

natured of poets, as well as yourselves, will forgive me, and lay the blame on the better-qualified, who have so long neglected the task. Cowper should have done it. The author of 'John Gilpin,' and the 'Retired Cat,' would have put La Fontaine into every chimney-corner which resounds with the Anglo-Saxon tongue. . . . To you who have so generously enabled me to publish this work with so great advantages, and without selling the copyright for the *promise* of a song, I return my heartfelt thanks. A hatchet-faced, spectacled, threadbare stranger knocked at your doors, with a prospectus, unbacked by 'the trade,' soliciting your subscription to a costly edition of a mere translation. It is a most inglorious, unsatisfactory species of literature. The slightest preponderance of that worldly wisdom which never buys a pig-in-a-poke would have sent him and his translation packing. But a kind faith in your species got the better in your case. You not only gave the hungry-looking stranger your good wishes, but your good names. A list of those names it would delight me to insert; and I should certainly do it if I felt authorized. As it is, I hope to be pardoned for mentioning some of the individuals, who have not only given their names, but expressed an interest in my enterprise which has assisted me in its accomplishment. Rev. John Pierpont, Prof. George Ticknor, Prof. Henry W. Longfellow, William

H. Prescott, Esq., Hon. Theodore Lyman, Prof. Silliman, Prof. Denison Olmsted, Chancellor Kent, William C. Bryant, Esq., Dr. J. W. Francis, Hon. Peter A. Jay, Hon. Luther Bradish, and Prof. J. Molinard have special claims to my gratitude. . . .

The work — as it is, not as it ought to be — I commit to your kindness. I do not claim to have succeeded in translating ‘the inimitable La Fontaine,’ — perhaps I have not even a right to say, in his own language, —

‘J’ai du moins ouvert le chemin.’

However this may be, I am, gratefully,

Your obedient servant,

ELIZUR WRIGHT, JR.

DORCHESTER, September, 1841.





A PREFACE,

ON

FABLE, THE FABULISTS, AND LA FONTAINE.

BY THE TRANSLATOR.

HUMAN nature, when fresh from the hand of God, was full of poetry. Its sociality could not be pent within the bounds of the actual. To the lower inhabitants of air, earth, and water, — and even to those elements themselves, in all their parts and forms, — it gave speech and reason. The skies it peopled with beings, on the noblest model of which it could have any conception, — to wit, its own. The intercourse of these beings, thus created and endowed, — from the deity kindled into immortality by the imagination, to the clod personified for the moment, — gratified one of its strongest propensities; for man may well enough be defined as the historical animal. The faculty which, in after ages, was to chronicle the realities developed by time, had at first no employment but to place on record the productions of the imagination. Hence, fable

blossomed and ripened in the remotest antiquity. We see it mingling itself with the primeval history of all nations. It is not improbable that many of the narratives which have been preserved for us, by the bark or parchment of the first rude histories, as serious matters of fact, were originally apologues, or parables, invented to give power and wings to moral lessons, and afterwards modified, in their passage from mouth to mouth, by the well-known magic of credulity. The most ancient poets graced their productions with apologues. Hesiod's fable of the Hawk and the Nightingale is an instance. The fable, or parable, was anciently, as it is even now, a favourite weapon of the most successful orators. When Jotham would show the Shechemites the folly of their ingratitude, he uttered the fable of the Fig-Tree, the Olive, the Vine, and the Bramble. When the prophet Nathan would oblige David to pass a sentence of condemnation upon himself in the matter of Uriah, he brought before him the apologue of the rich man who, having many sheep, took away that of the poor man who had but one. When Joash, the king of Israel, would rebuke the vanity of Amaziah, the king of Judah, he referred him to the fable of the Thistle and the Cedar. Our blessed Saviour, the best of all teachers, was remarkable for his constant use of parables, which are but fables — we speak it with reverence — adapted to the

gravity of the subjects on which he discoursed. And, in profane history, we read that Stesichorus put the Himerians on their guard against the tyranny of Phalaris by the fable of the Horse and the Stag. Cyrus, for the instruction of kings, told the story of the fisher obliged to use his nets to take the fish that turned a deaf ear to the sound of his flute. Menenius Agrippa, wishing to bring back the mutinous Roman people from Mount Sacer, ended his harangue with the fable of the Belly and the Members. A Ligurian, in order to dissuade King Comanus from yielding to the Phocians a portion of his territory as the site of Marseilles, introduced into his discourse the story of the bitch that borrowed a kennel in which to bring forth her young, but, when they were sufficiently grown, refused to give it up.

In all these instances we see that fable was a mere auxiliary of discourse, — an implement of the orator. Such, probably, was the origin of the apologues which now form the bulk of the most popular collections. *Æsop*, who lived about six hundred years before Christ, so far as we can reach the reality of his life, was an orator who wielded the apologue with remarkable skill. From a servile condition, he rose, by the force of his genius, to be the counsellor of kings and states. His wisdom was in

demand far and wide, and on the most important occasions. The pithy apologues which fell from his lips, which, like the rules of arithmetic, solved the difficult problems of human conduct constantly presented to him, were remembered when the speeches that contained them were forgotten. He seems to have written nothing himself; but it was not long before the gems which he scattered began to be gathered up in collections, as a distinct species of literature. The great and good Socrates employed himself, while in prison, in turning the fables of *Æsop* into verse. Though but a few fragments of his composition have come down to us, he may, perhaps, be regarded as the father of fable considered as a distinct art. Induced by his example, many Greek poets and philosophers tried their hands in it. Archilocus, Alcæus, Aristotle, Plato, Diodorus, Plutarch, and Lucian have left us specimens. Collections of fables bearing the name of *Æsop* became current in the Greek language. It was not, however, till the year 1447 that the large collection which now bears his name was put forth in Greek prose by Planudes, a monk of Constantinople. This man turned the life of *Æsop* itself into a fable; and La-Fontaine did it the honour to translate it as a preface to his own collection. Though burdened with insufferable puerilities, it is not with-

out the moral that a rude and deformed exterior may conceal both wit and worth.

The collection of fables in Greek verse by Babrias was exceedingly popular among the Romans; it was the favourite book of the Emperor Julian. Only six of these fables, and a few fragments, remain; but they are sufficient to show that their author possessed all the graces of style which befit the apologue. Some critics place him in the Augustan age; others make him contemporary with Moschus. His work was versified in Latin, at the instance of Seneca; and Quintilian refers to it as a reading-book for boys. Thus, at all times, these playful fictions have been considered fit lessons for children, as well as for men, who are often but grown-up children. So popular were the fables of Babrias and their Latin translation, during the Roman empire, that the work of Phædrus was hardly noticed. The latter was a freedman of Augustus, and wrote in the reign of Tiberius. His verse stands almost unrivalled for its exquisite elegance and compactness; and posterity has abundantly avenged him for the neglect of contemporaries. La Fontaine is perhaps more indebted to Phædrus than to any other of his predecessors; and, especially in the first six books, his style has much of the same curious condensation. When the seat of the empire was transferred to Byzantium, the Greek language

took precedence of the Latin ; and the rhetorician Apthonius wrote forty fables in Greek prose, which became popular. Besides these collections among the Romans, we find apologues scattered through the writings of their best poets and historians, and embalmed in those specimens of their oratory which have come down to us.

The apologues of the Greeks and Romans were brief, pithy, and epigrammatic, and their collections were without any principle of connection . But at the same time, though probably unknown to them, the same species of literature was flourishing elsewhere under a somewhat different form. It is made a question whether Æsop, through the Assyrians, with whom the Phrygians had commercial relations, did not either borrow his art from the Orientals, or lend it to them. This disputed subject must be left to those who have a taste for such inquiries. Certain it is, however, that fable flourished very anciently with the people whose faith embraces the doctrine of metempsychosis. Among the Hindoos there are two very ancient collections of fables, which differ from those which we have already mentioned, in having a principle of connection throughout. They are, in fact, extended romances or dramas, in which all sorts of creatures are introduced as actors, and in which there is a development of sentiment and passion as well as of moral truth, the whole being

wrought into a system of morals particularly adapted to the use of those called to govern. One of these works is called the 'Pantcha Tantra,' which signifies 'Five Books,' or Pentateuch; it is written in prose. The other is called the 'Hitopadesa,' or 'Friendly Instruction,' and is written in verse. Both are in the ancient Sanscrit language, and bear the name of a Brahmin, Vishnoo Sarmah,¹ as the author. Sir William Jones, who is inclined to make this author the true Æsop of the world, and to doubt the existence of the Phrygian, gives him the preference to all other fabulists both in regard to matter and manner. He has left a prose translation of the 'Hitopadesa,' which, though it may not fully sustain his enthusiastic preference, shows it not to be entirely groundless. We give a sample of it, and select a fable which La Fontaine has served up as the twenty-seventh of his eighth book. It should be understood that the fable, with the moral reflections which accompany it, is taken from the speech of one animal to another.

'Frugality should ever be practised, but not excessive parsimony; for see how a miser was killed by a bow drawn by himself!'

¹ *Vishnoo Sarmah*. — Sir William Jones has the name *Vishnu-sarman*. He says, further, that the word *Hitopadesa* comes from *hita*, signifying fortune, prosperity, utility, and *upadesa*, signifying advice, the entire word meaning 'salutary or amicable instruction.' — ED.

‘How was that?’ said Hiranyaca.

‘In the country of Calyanacataca,’ said Menthara, ‘lived a mighty hunter named Bhairaza, or Terrible. One day he went, in search of game, into a forest on the mountains Vindhya; when, having slain a fawn, and taken it up, he perceived a boar of tremendous size; he therefore threw the fawn on the ground, and wounded the boar with an arrow; the beast, horribly roaring, rushed upon him, and wounded him desperately, so that he fell, like a tree stricken with an axe.

• • • • •
‘In the mean while a jackal, named Lougery, was roving in search of food; and, having perceived the fawn, the hunter, and the boar, all three dead, he said to himself, “What a noble provision is here made for me!”

‘As the pains of men assail them unexpectedly, so their pleasures come in the same manner; a divine power strongly operates in both.

“Be it so; the flesh of these three animals will sustain me a whole month, or longer.

“A man suffices for one month; a fawn and a boar, for two; a snake, for a whole day; and then I will devour the bowstring.” When the first impulse of his hunger was allayed, he said, “This flesh is not yet tender; let me taste the twisted string with which the horns of this bow are joined.” So saying,

he began to gnaw it ; but, in the instant when he had cut the string, the severed bow leaped forcibly up, and wounded him in the breast, so that he departed in the agonies of death. This I meant when I cited the verse, Frugality should ever be practised, etc.

.
 ‘ What thou givest to distinguished men, and what thou eatest every day, — that, in my opinion, is thine own wealth : whose is the remainder which thou hoardest ? ’¹

It was one of these books which Chosroës, the king of Persia, caused to be translated from the Sanscrit into the ancient language of his country, in the sixth century of the Christian era, sending an embassy into Hindostan expressly for that purpose. Of the Persian book a translation was made in the time of the Calif Mansour, in the eighth century, into Arabic. This Arabic translation it is which became famous under the title of ‘ The Book of Calila and Dimna, or the Fables of Bidpai. ’² Calila

¹ Works of Sir William Jones, vol. vi. pp. 35-37 (edition 1799, 6 vols., 4to). — ED.

² An English translation from the Arabic appeared in 1819, done by the Rev. Wyndham Knatchbull. Sir William Jones says that the word *Bidpaii* signifies beloved, or favourite, physician. And he adds that the word *Pilpay*, which has taken the place of *Bidpaii* in some editions of these fables, is the result simply of a blunder in copying

and Dimna are the names of two jackals that figure in the history, and Bidpai is one of the principal human interlocutors, who came to be mistaken for the author. This remarkable book was turned into verse by several of the Arabic poets, was translated into Greek, Hebrew, Latin, modern Persian, and, in the course of a few centuries, either directly or indirectly, into most of the languages of modern Europe.

Forty-one of the unadorned and disconnected fables of Æsop were also translated into Arabic at a period somewhat more recent than the Hegira, and passed by the name of the 'Fables of Lokman.' Their want of poetical ornament prevented them from acquiring much popularity with the Arabians; but they became well known in Europe, as furnishing a convenient text-book in the study of Arabic.

The Hitopadesa, the fountain of poetic fables, with its innumerable translations and modifications, seems to have had the greatest charms for the Orientals. As it passed down the stream of time, version after version, the ornament and machinery outgrew the moral instruction, till it gave birth, at last, to such works of mere amusement as the 'Thousand and One Nights.'

the word *Bidpaii* from the original. La Fontaine himself uses the word *Pilpay* twice in his Fables, viz., in Fables XII. and XV., Book XII. — ED.

Fable slept, with other things, in the dark ages of Europe. Abridgments took the place of the large collections, and probably occasioned the entire loss of some of them. As literature revived, fable was resuscitated. The Crusades had brought European mind in contact with the Indian works which we have already described, in their Arabic dress. Translations and imitations in the European tongues were speedily multiplied. The 'Romance of the Fox,' the work of Perrot de Saint-Cloud, one of the most successful of these imitations, dates back to the thirteenth century. It found its way into most of the Northern languages, and became a household book. It undoubtedly had great influence over the taste of succeeding ages, shedding upon the severe and satirical wit of the Greek and Roman literature the rich, mellow light of Asiatic poetry. The poets of that age were not confined, however, to fables from the Hindoo source. Marie de France also, in the thirteenth century, versified one hundred of the fables of Æsop, translating from an English collection which does not now appear to be extant. Her work is entitled the *Ysopet*, or 'Little Æsop.' Other versions, with the same title, were subsequently written. It was in 1447 that Planudes, already referred to, wrote in Greek prose a collection of fables, prefacing it with a life of Æsop which for a long time passed for the veritable work of that

ancient. In the next century, Absternius wrote two hundred fables in Latin prose, partly of modern, but chiefly of ancient, invention. At this time the vulgar languages had undergone so great changes that works in them of two or three centuries old could not be understood, and consequently the Latin became the favourite language of authors. Many collections of fables were written in it, both in prose and verse. By the art of printing, these works were greatly multiplied; and again the poets undertook the task of translating them into the language of the people. The French led the way in this species of literature, their language seeming to present some great advantages for it. One hundred years before La Fontaine, Corrozet, Guillaume Gueroult, and Philibert Hegemon had written beautiful fables in verse, which it is supposed La Fontaine must have read and profited by, although they had become nearly obsolete in his time. It is a remarkable fact that these poetical fables should so soon have been forgotten. It was soon after their appearance that the languages of Europe attained their full development; and, at this epoch, prose seems to have been universally preferred to poetry. So strong was this preference that Ogilby, the Scotch fabulist, who had written a collection of fables in English verse, reduced them to prose on the occasion of publishing a more splendid edition, in 1668. It seems to have

been the settled opinion of the critics of that age, as it has, indeed, been stoutly maintained since, that the ornaments of poetry only impair the force of the fable, — that the Muses, by becoming the handmaids of old Æsop, part with their own dignity without conferring any on him. La Fontaine has made such an opinion almost heretical. In his manner there is a perfect originality, and an immortality every way equal to that of the matter which he gathered up from all parts of the great storehouse of human experience. His fables are like pure gold enveloped in solid rock-crystal. In English, a few of the fables of Gay, of Moore, and of Cowper may be compared with them in some respects, but we have nothing resembling them as a whole. Gay, who has done more than any other, though he has displayed great power of invention, and has given his verse a flow worthy of his master, Pope, has yet fallen far behind La Fontaine in the general management of his materials. His fables are all beautiful poems, but few of them are beautiful fables. His animal speakers do not sufficiently preserve their animal characters. It is quite otherwise with La Fontaine. His beasts are made most nicely to observe all the proprieties, not only of the scene in which they are called to speak, but of the great drama into which they are from time to time introduced. His work constitutes an harmonious whole. To those who read it

in the original, it is one of the few which never cloy the appetite. As in the poetry of Burns, you are apt to think the last verse you read of him the best.

But the main object of this Preface was to give a few traces of the life and literary career of our poet. A remarkable poet cannot but have been a remarkable man. Suppose we take a man with native benevolence amounting almost to folly ; but little cunning, caution, or veneration ; good perceptive, but better reflective faculties ; and a dominant love of the beautiful, — and toss him into the focus of civilization in the age of Louis XIV. It is an interesting problem to find out what will become of him. Such is the problem worked out in the life of JEAN DE LA FONTAINE, born on the 8th of July, 1621, at Château-Thierry. His father, a man of some substance and station, committed two blunders in disposing of his son. First, he encouraged him to seek an education for ecclesiastical life, which was evidently unsuited to his disposition. Second, he brought about his marriage with a woman who was unfitted to secure his affections or to manage his domestic affairs. In one other point he was not so much mistaken : he laboured unremittingly to make his son a poet. Jean was a backward boy, and showed not the least spark of poetical genius till his twenty-second year. His

poetical genius did not ripen till long after that time. But his father lived to see him all, and more than all, that he had ever hoped.¹

¹ The Translator in his sixth edition replaced the next paragraph by the following remarks: 'The case is apparently, and only apparently, an exception to the old rule, *Poeta nascitur, orator fit*,—the poet is born, the orator is made. The truth is, without exception, that every poet is born such; and many are born such of whose poetry the world knows nothing. Every known poet is also somewhat an orator; and as to this part of his character, he is made. And many are known as poets who are altogether made; they are mere second-hand, or orator poets, and are quite intolerable unless exceedingly well made,—which is, unfortunately, seldom the case. It would be wise in them to busy themselves as mere translators. Every one who is born with propensities to love and wonder too strong and deep to be worn off by repetition or continuance,—in other words, who is born to be always young,—is born a poet. The other requisites he has of course. Upon him the making will never be lost. The richest gems do most honour to their polishing; but they are gems without any. So there are men who pass through the world with their souls full of poetry, who would not believe you if you were to tell them so. Happy for them is their ignorance, perhaps. La Fontaine came near being one of them. All that is artificial in poetry to him came late and with difficulty. Yet it resulted from his keen relish of nature, that he was never satisfied with his art of verse till he had brought it to the confines of perfection. He did not philosophize over the animals, he sympathized with them. A philosopher would not have lost a fashionable dinner in

But we will first, in few words, despatch the worst — for there is a very bad part — of his life. It was not specially *his* life, it was the life of the age in which he lived. The man of strong amorous propensities, in that age and country, who was, nevertheless, faithful to vows of either marriage or celibacy, — the latter vows then proved sadly dangerous to the former, — may be regarded as a miracle. La Fontaine, without any agency of his own affections, found himself married at the age of twenty-six, while yet as immature as most men are at sixteen. The upshot was, that his patrimony dwindled; and though he lived many years with his wife, and had a son, he neglected her more and more, till at last he forgot that he had been married, though he unfortunately did not forget that there were other women in the world besides his wife. His genius and benevolence gained him friends everywhere with both sexes, who never suffered him to want, and who had never cause to complain of his ingratitude. But he was always the special favourite of the Aspasia's who ruled France and her kings. To his admiration of a common ant-hill. La Fontaine did so once, because the well-known little community was engaged in what he took to be a funeral; he could not in decency leave them till it was over. Verse-making out of the question, this was to be a genuine poet, though, with commonplace mortals, it was also to be a fool.'

please them, he wrote a great deal of fine poetry, much of which deserves to be everlastingly forgotten. It must be said for him that his vice became conspicuous only in the light of one of his virtues. His frankness would never allow concealment. He scandalized his friends Boileau and Racine; still, it is matter of doubt whether they did not excel him rather in prudence than in purity. But, whatever may be said in palliation, it is lamentable to think that a heaven-lighted genius should have been made, in any way, to minister to a hell-venomed vice, which has caused unutterable woes to France and the world. Some time before he died, he repented bitterly of this part of his course, and laboured, no doubt sincerely, to repair the mischiefs he had done.

As we have already said, Jean was a backward boy. But, under a dull exterior, the mental machinery was working splendidly within. He lacked all that outside care and prudence, that constant looking out for breakers, which obstruct the growth and ripening of the reflective faculties. The vulgar, by a queer mistake, call a man *absent-minded* when his mind shuts the door, pulls in the latch-string, and is wholly at home. La Fontaine's mind was exceedingly domestic. It was nowhere but at home when, riding from Paris to Château-Thierry, a bundle of papers fell from his saddle-bow without

his perceiving it. The mail-carrier, coming behind him, picked it up, and overtaking La Fontaine, asked him if he had lost anything. 'Certainly not,' he replied, looking about him with great surprise. 'Well, I have just picked up these papers,' rejoined **the other**. 'Ah, they are mine,' cried La Fontaine; 'they involve my whole estate.' And he eagerly reached to take them. On another occasion he was equally at home. Stopping on a journey, he ordered dinner at an hotel, and then took a ramble about the town. On his return, he entered another hotel, and, passing through into the garden, took from his pocket a copy of Livy, in which he quietly set himself to read till his dinner should be ready. The book made him forget his appetite, till a servant informed him of his mistake, and he returned to his hotel just in time to pay his bill and proceed on his journey.

It will be perceived that he took the world quietly, and his doing so undoubtedly had important bearings on his style. We give another anecdote, which illustrates this peculiarity of his mind as well as the superlative folly of duelling. Not long after his marriage, with all his indifference to his wife, he was persuaded into a fit of singular jealousy. He was intimate with an ex-captain of dragoons, by name Poignant, who had retired to Château-Thierry, — a frank, open-hearted man, but of extremely little

gallantry. Whenever Poignant was not at his inn, he was at La Fontaine's, and consequently with his wife when he himself was not at home. Some person took it in his head to ask La Fontaine why he suffered these constant visits. 'And why,' said La Fontaine, 'should I not? He is my best friend.' 'The public think otherwise,' was the reply; 'they say that he comes for the sake of Madame La Fontaine.' 'The public is mistaken; but what must I do in the case?' said the poet. 'You must demand satisfaction, sword in hand, of one who has dishonoured you.' 'Very well,' said La Fontaine, 'I will demand it.' The next day he called on Poignant, at four o'clock in the morning, and found him in bed. 'Rise,' said he, 'and come out with me!' His friend asked him what was the matter, and what pressing business had brought him so early in the morning. 'I shall let you know,' replied La Fontaine, 'when we get abroad.' Poignant, in great astonishment, rose, followed him out, and asked whither he was leading. 'You shall know by and by,' replied La Fontaine; and at last, when they had reached a retired place, he said, 'My friend, we must fight.' Poignant, still more surprised, sought to know in what he had offended him, and moreover represented to him that they were not on equal terms. 'I am a man of war,' said he, 'while, as for you, you have never drawn a sword.' 'No matter,'

said La Fontaine ; ‘ the public requires that I should fight you.’ Poignant; after having resisted in vain, at last drew his sword, and, having easily made himself máster of La Fontaine’s, demanded the cause of the quarrel. ‘ The public maintains,’ said La Fontaine, ‘ that you come to my house daily, not for my sake, but my wife’s.’ ‘ Ah, my friend,’ replied the other, ‘ I should never have suspected that was the cause of your displeasure, and I protest I will never again put a foot within your doors.’ ‘ On the contrary,’ replied La Fontaine, seizing him by the hand, ‘ I have satisfied the public ; and now you must come to my house every day, or I will fight you again.’ The two antagonists returned, and breakfasted together in good-humour.

It was not, as we have said, till his twenty-second year that La Fontaine showed any taste for poetry. The occasion was this : An officer, in winter-quarters at Château-Thierry, one day read to him, with great spirit, an ode of Malherbe, beginning thus :

Que direz-vous, races futures,
Si quelquefois un vrai discours
Vous récite les aventures
De nos abominables jours ?

Or, as we might paraphrase it, —

What will ye say, ye future days,
If I, for once, in honest rhymes,
Recount to you the deeds and ways
Of our abominable times ?

La Fontaine listened with involuntary transports of joy, admiration, and astonishment, as if a man born with a genius for music, but brought up in a desert, had for the first time heard a well-played instrument. He set himself immediately to reading Malherbe, passed his nights in learning his verses by heart, and his days in declaiming them in solitary places. He also read Voiture, and began to write verses in imitation. Happily, at this period, a relative named Pintrel directed his attention to ancient literature, and advised him to make himself familiar with Horace, Homer, Virgil, Terence, and Quinctilian. He accepted this counsel. M. de Maucroix, another of his friends, who cultivated poetry with success, also contributed to confirm his taste for the ancient models. His great delight, however, was to read Plato and Plutarch, which he did only through translations. The copies which he used are said to bear his manuscript notes on almost every page, and these notes are the maxims which are to be found in his fables. Returning from this study of the ancients, he read the moderns with more discrimination. His favourites, besides Malherbe, were Corneille, Rabelais, and Marot. In Italian he read Ariosto, Boccaccio, and Machiavel. In 1654 he published his first work, a translation of the 'Eunuch' of Terence. It met with no success. But this does not seem at all to have disturbed its author. He cultivated verse-making with as much ardour and

good-humour as ever ; and his verses soon began to be admired in the circle of his friends. No man had ever more devoted friends. Verses that have cost thought are not relished without thought. When a genius appears, it takes some little time for the world to educate itself to a knowledge of the fact. By one of his friends, La Fontaine was introduced to Fouquet, the minister of finance, a man of great power, and who rivalled his sovereign in wealth and luxury. It was his pride to be the patron of literary men, and he was pleased to make La Fontaine his poet, settling on him a pension of one thousand francs per annum, on condition that he should produce a piece in verse each quarter, — a condition which was exactly complied with till the fall of the minister.

Fouquet was a most splendid villain, and positively, though perhaps not comparatively, deserved to fall. But it was enough for La Fontaine that Fouquet had done him a kindness. He took the part of the disgraced minister, without counting the cost. His ‘Elegy to the Nymphs of Vaux’ was a shield to the fallen man, and turned popular hatred into sympathy. The good-hearted poet rejoiced exceedingly in its success. *Bon-homme* was the appellation which his friends pleasantly gave him, and by which he became known everywhere ; and never did a man better deserve it in its best sense. He was good by nature, — not by the calculation of

consequences. Indeed, it does not seem ever to have occurred to him that kindness, gratitude, and truth could have any other than good consequences. He was truly a Frenchman without guile, and possessed to perfection that comfortable trait, — in which French character is commonly allowed to excel the English, — *good-humour* with the whole world.

La Fontaine was the intimate friend of Molière, Boileau, and Racine. Molière had already established a reputation ; but the others became known to the world at the same time. Boileau hired a small chamber in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, where they all met several times a week ; for La Fontaine, at the age of forty-four, had left Château-Thierry, and become a citizen of Paris. Here they discussed all sorts of topics, admitting to their society Chapelle, a man of less genius, but of greater conversational powers, than either of them, — a sort of connecting link between them and the world. Four poets or four men could hardly have been more unlike. Boileau was blustering, blunt, peremptory, but honest and frank ; Racine, of a pleasant and tranquil gaiety, but mischievous and sarcastic ; Molière was naturally considerate, pensive, and melancholy ; La Fontaine was often absent-minded, but sometimes exceedingly jovial, delighting with his sallies, his witty *naïvetés*, and his arch simplicity. These meetings, which no

doubt had a great influence upon French literature, La Fontaine, in one of his prefaces, thus describes : ' Four friends, whose acquaintance had begun at the foot of Parnassus, held a sort of society, which I should call an Academy if their number had been sufficiently great, and if they had had as much regard for the Muses as for pleasure. The first thing which they did was to banish from among them all rules of conversation, and everything which savours of the academic conference. When they met, and had sufficiently discussed their amusements, if chance threw them upon any point of science or belles-lettres, they profited by the occasion ; it was, however, without dwelling too long on the same subject, flitting from one thing to another like the bees that meet divers sorts of flowers on their way. Neither envy, malice, nor cabal had any voice among them. They adored the works of the ancients, never refused due praise to those of the moderns, spoke modestly of their own, and gave each other sincere counsel when any one of them — which rarely happened — fell into the malady of the age, and published a book.'

The absent-mindedness of our fabulist not unfrequently created much amusement on these occasions, and made him the object of mirthful conspiracies. So keenly was the game pursued by Boileau and Racine that the more considerate Molière felt obliged sometimes to expose and

rebuke them. Once, after having done so, he privately told a stranger, who was present with them, the wits would have worried themselves in vain ; they could not have obliterated the *bon-homme*.

La Fontaine, as we have said, was an admirer of Rabelais ; to what a pitch, the following anecdote may show : At one of the meetings at Boileau's were present Racine, Valincourt, and a brother of Boileau's, a doctor of the Sorbonne. The latter took it upon him to set forth the merits of St. Augustin, in a pompous eulogium. La Fontaine, plunged in one of his habitual reveries, listened without hearing. At last, rousing himself as if from a profound sleep, to prove that the conversation had not been lost upon him, he asked the doctor, with a very serious air, whether he thought St. Augustin had as much wit as Rabelais. The divine, surprised, looked at him from head to foot, and only replied, 'Take care, Monsieur La Fontaine ; you have put one of your stockings on wrong side outwards,' — which was the fact.

It was in 1668 that La Fontaine published his first collection of fables, under the modest title, 'Fables Choies mises en Vers,' in a quarto volume, with figures designed and engraved by Chauveau. It contained six books, and was dedicated to the Dauphin. Many of the fables had already been published in a separate form. The success of this collection was so great that it was reprinted the

same year in a smaller size. Fables had come to be regarded as beneath poetry ; La Fontaine established them at once on the top of Parnassus. The ablest poets of his age did not think it beneath them to enter the lists with him ; and it is needless to say they came off second best.

One of the fables of the first book is addressed to the Duke de la Rochefoucauld, and was the consequence of a friendship between La Fontaine and the author of the celebrated 'Maxims.' Connected with the duke was Madame La Fayette, one of the most learned and ingenious women of her age, who consequently became the admirer and friend of the fabulist. To her he wrote verses abundantly, as he did to all who made him the object of their kind regard. Indeed, notwithstanding his avowed indolence, or rather passion for quiet and sleep, his pen was very productive. In 1669, he published 'Psyché,' a romance in prose and verse, which he dedicated to the Duchess de Bouillon, in gratitude for many kindnesses. The prose is said to be better than the verse ; but this can hardly be true in respect to the following lines, in which the poet, under the apt name of Polyphile, in a hymn addressed to Pleasure, undoubtedly sketches himself :—

Volupté, Volupté, qui fus jadis maîtresse
 Du plus bel esprit de la Grèce,
 Ne me dédaigne pas ; viens-t'en loger chez moi :
 Tu n'y seras pas sans emploi :

J'aime le jeu, l'amour, les livres, la musique,
 La ville et la campagne, enfin tout ; il n'est rien
 Qui ne me soit souverain bien,
 Jusqu'au sombre plaisir d'un cœur mélancolique.
 Viens donc . . .

The characteristic grace and playfulness of this seem to defy translation. To the mere English reader, the sense may be roughly given thus :

Delight, Delight, who didst as mistress hold
 The finest wit of Grecian mould,
 Disdain not me ; but come,
 And make my house thy home.
 Thou shalt not be without employ :
 In play, love, music, books, I joy,
 In town and country ; and, indeed, there 's nought,
 E'en to the luxury of sober thought, —
 The sombre, melancholy mood, —
 But brings to me the sovereign good.
 Come, then, etc.

The same Polyphile, in recounting his adventures on a visit to the infernal regions, tells us that he saw, in the hands of the cruel Eumenides, —

Les auteurs de maint hymen forcé
 L'amant chiche, et la dame au cœur intéressé ;
 La troupe des censeurs, peuple à l'Amour rebelle ;
 Ceux enfin dont les vers ont noirci quelque belle.

Artificers of many a loveless match,
 And lovers who but sought the pence to catch ;
 The crew censorious, rebels against Love ;
 And those whose verses soiled the fair above.

To be 'rebels against Love' was quite unpardonable with La Fontaine; and to bring about a '*hymen forcé*' was a crime, of which he probably spoke with some personal feeling. The great popularity of 'Psyché' encouraged the author to publish two volumes of poems and tales in 1671, in which were contained several new fables. The celebrated Madame de Sévigné thus speaks of these fables, in one of her letters to her daughter: 'But have you not admired the beauty of the five or six fables of La Fontaine contained in one of the volumes which I sent you? We were charmed with them the other day at M. de la Rochefoucauld's: we got by heart that of the Monkey and the Cat.' Then, quoting some lines, she adds, 'This is painting! And the Pumpkin, and the Nightingale, they are worthy of the first volume!' It was in his stories that La Fontaine excelled; and Madame de Sévigné expresses a wish to invent a fable which would impress upon him the folly of leaving his peculiar province. He seemed himself not insensible where his strength lay, and seldom ventured upon any other ground, except at the instance of his friends. With all his lightness, he felt a deep veneration for religion, — the most spiritual and rigid which came within the circle of his immediate acquaintance. He admired Jansénius and the Port Royalists, and heartily loved Racine, who was of their faith. Count

Henri-Louis de Loménie, of Brienne, — who, after being Secretary of State, had retired to the Oratoire, — was engaged in bringing out a better collection of Christian lyrics. To this work he pressed La Fontaine, whom he called his particular friend, to lend his name and contributions. Thus the author of ‘Psyché,’ ‘Adonis,’ and ‘Joconde’ was led to the composition of pious hymns, and versifications of the Psalms of David. Gifted by nature with the utmost frankness of disposition, he sympathized fully with Arnauld and Pascal in the war against the Jesuits; and it would seem, from his ‘Ballade sur Escobar,’ that he had read and relished the ‘Provincial Letters.’ This ballad, as it may be a curiosity to many, shall be given entire: —

BALLADE

SUR ESCOBAR.

C’EST à bon droit que l’on condamne à Rome
 L’évêque d’Ypré,¹ auteur de vains débats;
 Ses sectateurs nous défendent en somme
 Tous les plaisirs que l’on goûte ici-bas.
 En paradis allant au petit pas,

¹ *Corneille Jansenius*. — The originator of the sect called Jansenists. Though he was bishop of Ypres, his chief work, ‘Augustinus,’ and his doctrines generally, were condemned by Popes Urban VIII. and Innocent X. as heretical (1641 and 1653). — ED.

On y parvient, quoi qu'ARNAULD¹ nous en die :
La volupté sans cause il a bannie.

Veut-on monter sur les célestes tours,
Chemin pierreux est grande rêverie,
ESCOBAR² sait un chemin de velours.

Il ne dit pas qu'on peut tuer un homme
Qui sans raison nous tient en altercas
Pour un fétu ou bien pour une pomme ;
Mais qu'on le peut pour quatre ou cinq ducats.
Même il soutient qu'on peut en certains cas
Faire un serment plein de supercherie,
S'abandonner aux douceurs de la vie,
S'il est besoin conserver ses amours.
Ne faut-il pas après cela qu'on crie :
ESCOBAR sait un chemin de velours ?

Au nom de Dieu, lisez-moi quelque somme
De ces écrits dont chez lui l'on fait cas.
Qu'est-il besoin qu'à présent je les nomme ?

¹ *Arnauld*. — This was Antoine Arnauld, doctor of the Sorbonne, and one of the Arnaulds famous among the Port Royalists, who were Jansenists in opposition to the Jesuits. He was born in 1612, and died a voluntary exile in Belgium, 1694. Boileau wrote his epitaph. — ED.

² *Escobar*. — A Spanish Jesuit, who flourished mostly in France, and wrote against the Jansenists. Pascal, as well as La Fontaine, ridiculed his convenient principles of morality, the 'chemin de velours,' as La Fontaine puts it. His chief work in moral theology was published in seven vols., folio, at Lyons, 1652-1663. He died in 1669. — ED.

Il en est tant qu'on ne les connoît pas.
 De leurs avis servez-vous pour compas ;
 N'admettez qu'eux en votre librairie ;
 Brûlez ARNAULD avec sa coterie,
 Près d'ESCOBAR ce ne sont qu'esprits lourds.
 Je vous le dis : ce n'est point raillerie,
 ESCOBAR sait un chemin de velours.

ENVOI.

Toi, que l'orgueil poussa dans la voirie,
 Qui tiens là-bas noire conciergerie,
 Lucifer, chef des infernales cours,
 Pour éviter les traits de ta furie,
 ESCOBAR sait un chemin de velours.

Thus does the *Bon-homme* treat the subtle Escobar, the prince and prototype of the moralists of *expediency*. To translate his artless and delicate irony is hardly possible. The writer of this hasty Preface offers the following only as an attempted imitation :

BALLAD

UPON ESCOBAR.

GOOD cause has Rome to reprobate
 The bishop who disputes her so ;
 His followers reject and hate
 All pleasures that we taste below.
 To heaven an easy pace may go,
 Whatever crazy ARNAULD saith,
 Who aims at pleasure causeless wrath.

Seek we the better world afar?
 We 're fools to choose the rugged path:
 A velvet road hath ESCOBAR.

Although he does not say you can,
 Should one with you for nothing strive,
 Or for a trifle, kill the man, —
 You can for ducats four or five.
 Indeed, if circumstances drive,
 Defraud or take false oaths you may,
 Or to the charms of life give way,
 When Love must needs the door unbar.
 Henceforth must not the pilgrim say,
 A velvet road hath ESCOBAR?

Now, would to God that one would state
 The pith of all his works to me.
 What boots it to enumerate?
 As well attempt to drain the sea! —
 Your chart and compass let them be;
 All other books put under ban;
 Burn ARNAULD and his rigid clan, —
 They 're blockheads if we but compare;
 It is no joke, — I tell you, man,
 A velvet road hath ESCOBAR.

ADDRESS.

Thou warden of the prison black,
 Who didst on heaven turn thy back,
 The chieftain of th' infernal war!
 To shun thy arrows and thy rack,
 A velvet road hath ESCOBAR.

The verses of La Fontaine did more for his reputation than for his purse. His paternal estate wasted away under his carelessness ; for, when the ends of the year refused to meet, he sold a piece of land sufficient to make them do so. His wife, no better qualified to manage worldly gear than himself, probably lived on her family friends, who were able to support her, and who seem to have done so without blaming him. She had lived with him in Paris for some time after that city became his abode ; but, tiring at length of the city life, she had returned to Château-Thierry, and occupied the family mansion. At the earnest exhortation of Boileau and Racine, who wished to make him a better husband, he returned to Château-Thierry himself, in 1666, for the purpose of becoming reconciled to his wife. But his purpose strangely vanished. He called at his own house, learned from the domestic, who did not know him, that Madame La Fontaine was in good health, and passed on to the house of a friend, where he tarried two days, and then returned to Paris without having seen his wife. When his friends inquired of him his success, with some confusion he replied, ‘ I have been to see her, but I did not find her : she was well.’ Twenty years after that, Racine prevailed on him to visit his patrimonial estate, to take some care of what remained. Racine, not hearing from him, sent to know what he was about, when La Fontaine

wrote as follows: 'Poignant, on his return from Paris, told me that you took my silence in very bad part; the worse, because you had been told that I have been incessantly at work since my arrival at Château-Thierry, and that, instead of applying myself to my affairs, I have had nothing in my head but verses. All this is no more than half true: my affairs occupy me as much as they deserve to, — that is to say, not at all; but the leisure which they leave me, — it is not poetry, but idleness, which makes away with it.' On a certain occasion, in the earlier part of his life, when pressed in regard to his improvidence, he gaily produced the following epigram, which has commonly been appended to his fables as 'The Epitaph of La Fontaine, written by Himself: ' —

JEAN s'en alla comme il était venu,
 Mangea le fonds avec le revenu,
 Tint les trésors chose peu nécessaire.
 Quant à son temps, bien sut le dispenser:
 Deux parts en fit, dont il souloit passer,
 L'une à dormir, et l'autre à ne rien faire.

This confession, the immortality of which was so little foreseen by its author, liberally rendered, amounts to the following: —

JOHN went as he came, — ate his farm with its fruits,
 Held treasure to be but the cause of disputes;

And, as to his time, be it frankly confessed,
Divided it daily as suited him best, —
Gave a part to his sleep, and to nothing the rest.

It is clear that a man who provided so little for himself needed good friends to do it; and Heaven kindly furnished them. When his affairs began to be straitened, he was invited by the celebrated Madame de la Sablière to make her house his home; and there, in fact, he was thoroughly domiciliated for twenty years. 'I have sent away all my domestics,' said that lady, one day; 'I have kept only my dog, my cat, and La Fontaine.' She was perhaps the best-educated woman in France, was the mistress of several languages, knew Horace and Virgil by heart, and had been thoroughly indoctrinated in all the sciences by the ablest masters. Her husband, M. Rambouillet de la Sablière, was secretary to the king, and register of domains, and to immense wealth united considerable poetical talents, with a thorough knowledge of the world. It was the will of Madame de la Sablière that her favourite poet should have no further care for his external wants; and never was a mortal more perfectly resigned. He did all honour to the sincerity of his amiable hostess; and, if he ever showed a want of independence, he certainly did not of gratitude. Compliments of more touching tenderness we nowhere

meet than those which La Fontaine has paid to his benefactress. He published nothing which was not first submitted to her eye, and entered into her affairs and friendships with all his heart. Her unbounded confidence in his integrity she expressed by saying, 'La Fontaine never lies in prose.' By her death, in 1693, our fabulist was left without a home; but his many friends vied with each other which should next furnish one. He was then seventy-two years of age, had turned his attention to personal religion, and received the seal of conversion at the hands of the Roman Catholic Church. In his conversion, as in the rest of his life, his frankness left no room to doubt his sincerity. The writings which had justly given offence to the good were made the subject of a public confession, and everything in his power was done to prevent their circulation. The death of one who had done so much for him, and whose last days — devoted with the most self-denying benevolence to the welfare of her species — had taught him a most salutary lesson, could not but be deeply felt. He had just left the house of his deceased benefactress, never again to enter it, when he met M. d'Hervart in the street, who eagerly said to him, 'My dear La Fontaine, I was looking for you, to beg you to come and take lodgings in my house.' 'I was going thither,' replied La Fontaine. No reply could have been more char-

acteristic. The fabulist had not in him sufficient hypocrisy of which to manufacture the commonplace politeness of society. His was the politeness of a warm and unsuspecting heart. He never concealed his confidence in the fear that it might turn out to be misplaced.

His second collection of fables, containing five books, La Fontaine published in 1678-79, with a dedication to Madame de Montespan; the previous six books were republished at the same time, revised, and enlarged. The twelfth book was not added till many years after, and proved, in fact, the song of the dying swan. It was written for the special use of the young Duke de Bourgogne, the royal pupil of Fénelon, to whom it contains frequent allusions. The eleven books now published sealed the reputation of La Fontaine, and were received with distinguished regard by the king, who appended to the ordinary protocol, or imprimatur for publication, the following reasons: 'In order to testify to the author the esteem we have for his person and his merit, and because youth have received great advantage in their education from the fables selected and put in verse, which he has heretofore published.' The author was, moreover, permitted to present his book in person to the sovereign. For this purpose he repaired to Versailles; and after having well delivered himself of his compliment to royalty, perceived

that he had forgotten to bring the book which he was to present ; he was, nevertheless, favourably received, and loaded with presents. But it is added that, on his return, he also lost, by his absence of mind, the purse full of gold which the king had given him, which was happily found under a cushion of the carriage in which he rode.

In his Advertisement to the second part of his Fables, La Fontaine informs the reader that he had treated his subjects in a somewhat different style. In fact, in his first collection he had timidly confined himself to the brevity of Æsop and Phædrus ; but, having observed that those fables were most popular in which he had given most scope to his own genius, he threw off the trammels in the second collection, and, in the opinion of the writer, much for the better. His subjects, too, in the second part, are frequently derived from the Indian fabulists, and bring with them the richness and dramatic interest of the ‘ Hitopadesa.’

Of all his fables, the Oak and the Reed is said to have been the favourite of La Fontaine. But his critics have almost unanimously given the palm of excellence to the Animals Sick of the Plague, the first of the seventh book. Its exquisite poetry, the perfection of its dialogue, and the weight of its moral, well entitle it to the place. That must have been a soul replete with honesty which could read

such a lesson in the ears of a proud and oppressive court. Indeed, we may look in vain through this encyclopædia of fable for a sentiment which goes to justify the strong in their oppression of the weak. Even in the midst of the fulsome compliments which it was the fashion of his age to pay to royalty, La Fontaine maintains a reserve and decency peculiar to himself. By an examination of his fables, we think, we might fairly establish for him the character of an honest and disinterested lover and respecter of his species. In his fable entitled *Death and the Dying*, he unites the genius of Pascal and Molière; in that of the *Two Doves* is a tenderness quite peculiar to himself, and an insight into the heart worthy of Shakspeare. In his *Mogul's Dream* are sentiments worthy of the very high-priest of nature, and expressed in his own native tongue with a felicity which makes the translator feel that all his labours are but vanity and vexation of spirit. But it is not the purpose of this brief Preface to criticise the Fables. It is sufficient to say that the work occupies a position in French literature, which, after all has been said that can be for Gay, Moore, and other English versifiers of fables, is left quite vacant in ours.

Our author was elected a member of the **French Academy** in 1684, and received with the honour of

a public session. He read on this occasion a poem of exquisite beauty, addressed to his benefactress, Madame de la Sablière. In that distinguished body of men he was a universal favourite, and none, perhaps, did more to promote its prime object, — the improvement of the French language. We have already seen how he was regarded by some of the greatest minds of his age. Voltaire, who never did more than justice to merit other than his own, said of the Fables, ‘I hardly know a book which more abounds with charms adapted to the people, and at the same time to persons of refined taste. I believe that, of all authors, La Fontaine is the most universally read. He is for all minds and all ages.’ La Bruyère, when admitted to the Academy, in 1693, was warmly applauded for his *éloge* upon La Fontaine, which contained the following words: ‘More equal than Marot, and more poetical than Voiture, La Fontaine has the playfulness, felicity, and artlessness of both. He instructs while he sports, persuades men to virtue by means of beasts, and exalts trifling subjects to the sublime; a man unique in his species of composition, always original, whether he invents or translates, who has gone beyond his models, himself a model hard to imitate.’

La Fontaine, as we have said, devoted his later days to religion. In this he was sustained and

cheered by his old friends Racine and De Maucroix. Death overtook him while applying his poetical powers to the hymns of the Church. To De Maucroix he wrote, a little before his death: 'I assure you that the best of your friends cannot count upon more than fifteen days of life. For these two months I have not gone abroad, except occasionally to attend the Academy, for a little amusement. Yesterday, as I was returning from it, in the middle of the Rue du Chantre, I was taken with such a faintness that I really thought myself dying. Oh, my friend, to die is nothing; but think you how I am going to appear before God! You know how I have lived. Before you receive this billet, the gates of eternity will perhaps have been opened upon me.'

To this, a few days after, his friend replied: 'If God, in his kindness, restores you to health, I hope you will come and spend the rest of your life with me, and we shall often talk together of the mercies of God. If, however, you have not strength to write, beg M. Racine to do me that kindness, the greatest he can ever do for me. Adieu, my good, my old, and my true friend. May God, in his infinite goodness, take care of the health of your body and that of your soul.' He died the 13th of April, 1695, at the age of seventy-three, and was buried in the cemetery of the Saints-Innocents.

When Fénelon heard of his death, he wrote a Latin eulogium, which he gave to his royal pupil to translate. ‘La Fontaine is no more!’ said Fénelon, in this composition; ‘he is no more! And with him have gone the playful jokes, the merry laugh, the artless graces, and the sweet Muses.’





THE FABLES OF LA FONTAINE.

—◆—
TO MONSEIGNEUR THE DAUPHIN.¹*

I SING the heroes of old Æsop's line,
Whose tale, though false when strictly we define,
Containeth truths it were not ill to teach.
With me all natures use the gift of speech ;
Yea, in my work, the very fishes preach,
And to our human selves their sermons suit.
'T is thus, to come at man, I use the brute.

SON OF A PRINCE the favourite of the skies,
On whom the world entire hath fixed its eyes,

* See notes at the end of the volume. Whenever a similar reference occurs, the reader will understand that the same direction applies.

A louder voice than mine must tell in song
What virtues to thy kingly line belong.
I seek thine ear to gain by lighter themes,
Slight pictures, decked in magic nature's beams ;
And if to please thee shall not be my pride,
I'll gain at least the praise of having tried.
Who hence shall count his conquests by his days,
And gather from the proudest lips his praise.





BOOK ONE.

I.

THE GRASSHOPPER AND THE ANT.²

A GRASSHOPPER gay
Sang the summer away,
And found herself poor
By the winter's first roar.
Of meat or of bread,
Not a morsel she had !
So a begging she went,
To her neighbour the ant,
 For the loan of some wheat,
 Which would serve her to eat,
Till the season came round.
 'I will pay you,' she saith,
 'On an animal's faith,
Double weight in the pound
Ere the harvest be bound.'
 The ant is a friend
 (And here she might mend)
 Little giver to lend.

‘How spent you the summer?’

Quoth she, looking shame
At the borrowing dame.

‘Night and day to each comer

I sang, if you please.’

‘You sang! I ’m at ease ;
For ’t is plain at a glance,
Now, ma'am, you must dance.’

II.

THE RAVEN AND THE FOX.*

PERCHED on a lofty oak,

Sir Raven held a lunch of cheese ;

Sir Fox, who smelt it in the breeze,

Thus to the holder spoke :

‘Ha ! how do you do, Sir Raven?

Well, your coat, sir, is a brave one !

So black and glossy, on my word, sir,

With voice to match, you were a bird, sir,

Well fit to be the Phoenix of these days.’

Sir Raven, overset with praise,

Must show how musical his croak.

Down fell the luncheon from the oak ;

Which snatching up, Sir Fox thus spoke :

‘The flatterer, my good sir,

Aye liveth on his listener ;

Which lesson, if you please,
 Is doubtless worth the cheese.'
 A bit too late, Sir Raven swore
 The rogue should never cheat him more.

III.

THE FROG THAT WISHED TO BE AS
BIG AS THE OX.⁴

THE tenant of a bog,
 An envious little frog
 Not bigger than an egg,
 A stately bullock spies,
 And, smitten with his size,
 Attempts to be as big.
 With earnestness and pains
 She stretches, swells, and strains,
 And says, 'Sir Frog, look here! see me!
 Is this enough?' 'No, no.'
 'Well, then, is this?' 'Poh! poh!
 Enough! you don't begin to be.'
 And thus the reptile sits,
 Enlarging till she splits.
 The world is full of folks
 Of just such wisdom:
 The lordly dome provokes
 The cit to build his dome;
 And, really, there is no telling
 How much great men set little ones a swelling.

IV.

THE TWO MULES.

Two mules were bearing on their backs,
One, oats ; the other, silver of the tax.⁵

The latter, glorying in his load,

Marched proudly forward on the road,
And from the jingle of his bell,

'T was plain he liked his burden well.

But in a wild-wood glen

A band of robber men

Rushed forth upon the twain.

Well with the silver pleased,

They by the bridle seized

The treasure-mule so vain.

Poor mule ! in struggling to repel

His ruthless foes, he fell,

Stabbed through ; and with a bitter sighing

He cried, ' Is this the lot they promised me ?

My humble friend from danger free,

While, weltering in my gore, I 'm dying !'

' My friend,' his fellow-mule replied,

' It is not well to have one's work too high.

If thou hadst been a miller's drudge, as I,

Thou wouldst not thus have died'

V.

THE WOLF AND THE DOG.⁶

A PROWLING wolf, whose shaggy skin
(So strict the watch of dogs had been)
 Hid little but his bones,
Once met a mastiff dog astray.
A prouder, fatter, sleeker Tray,
 No human mortal owns.
Sir Wolf, in famished plight,
 Would fain have made a ration
 Upon his fat relation ;
But then he first must fight ;
 And well the dog seemed able
 To save from wolfish table
His carcass snug and tight.
 So, then, in civil conversation,
 The wolf expressed his admiration
Of Tray's fine case. Said Tray, politely,
' Yourself, good sir, may be as sightly ;
 Quit but the woods, advised by me.
 For all your fellows here, I see,
Are shabby wretches, lean and gaunt,
Belike to die of haggard want.
With such a pack, of course, it follows,
One fights for every bit he swallows.

Come, then, with me, and share
On equal terms our princely fare.'

'But what with you
Has one to do?'

Inquires the wolf. 'Light work indeed,'
Replies the dog; 'you only need
To bark a little now and then,
To chase off duns and beggar men,
To fawn on friends that come or go forth,
Your master please, and so forth;
For which you have to eat
All sorts of well-cooked meat, —
Cold pullets, pigeons, savoury messes, —
Besides unnumbered fond caresses.'

The wolf, by force of appetite,
Accepts the terms outright,
Tears glistening in his eyes.
But faring on, he spies

A galled spot on the mastiff's neck.

'What's that?' he cries. 'Oh, nothing but a speck.'
'A speck?' 'Ay, ay; 't is not enough to pain
me;

Perhaps the collar's mark by which they chain
me.'

'Chain! chain you! What! run you not, then,
Just where you please, and when?'

'Not always, sir; but what of that?'

'Enough, for me, to spoil your fat!

It ought to be a precious price
 Which could to servile chains entice ;
 For me, I 'll shun them while I 've wit.'
 So ran Sir Wolf, and runneth yet.

VI.

THE HEIFER, THE GOAT, AND THE SHEEP,
 IN COMPANY WITH THE LION.'

THE heifer, the goat, and their sister, the sheep,
 Compacted their earnings in common to keep,
 'Tis said, in time past, with a lion, who swayed
 Full lordship o'er neighbours, of whatever grade.
 The goat, as it happened, a stag having snared,
 Sent off to the rest, that the beast might be shared.
 All gathered ; the lion first counts on his claws,
 And says, ' We 'll proceed to divide with our paws
 The stag into pieces, as fixed by our laws.'

This done, he announces part first as his own ;
 ' 'Tis mine,' he says, ' truly, as lion alone.'

To such a decision there 's nought to be said,
 As he who has made it is doubtless the head.
 ' Well, also, the second to me should belong ;
 'T is mine, be it known, by the right of the strong.
 Again, as the bravest, the third must be mine.
 To touch but the fourth whoso maketh a sign,
 I 'll choke him to death
 In the space of a breath !'

VII.

THE WALLET.⁸

FROM heaven, one day, did Jupiter proclaim,
‘Let all that live before my throne appear,
And there, if any one hath aught to blame,
In matter, form, or texture of his frame,
He may bring forth his grievance without fear.
Redress shall instantly be given to each.
Come, monkey, now, first let us have your speech.
You see these quadrupeds, your brothers :
Comparing, then, yourself with others,
Are you well satisfied?’ ‘And wherefore not?’
Says Jock. ‘Have n’t I four trotters with the rest?
Is not my visage comely as the best?
But this my brother Bruin is a blot
On thy creation fair ;
And sooner than be painted I’d be shot,
Were I, great sire, a bear.’
The bear approaching, doth he make complaint?
Not he ; himself he lauds without restraint.
The éléphant he needs must criticize :
To crop his ears and stretch his tail were wise ;
A creature he of huge, misshapen size.
The elephant, though famed as beast judicious,
While on his own account he had no wishes,

Pronounced dame whale too big to suit his taste ;
 Of flesh and fat she was a perfect waste.
 The little ant, again, pronounced the gnat too wee ;
 To such a speck, a vast colossus she.
 Each censured by the rest, himself content,
 Back to their homes all living things were sent.
 Such folly liveth yet with human fools.
 For others lynxes, for ourselves but moles.
 Great blemishes in other men we spy,
 Which in ourselves we pass most kindly by.
 As in this world we 're but wayfarers,
 Kind Heaven has made us wallet-bearers.
 The pouch behind our own defects must store :
 The faults of others lodge in that before.

VIII.

 THE SWALLOW AND THE LITTLE
 BIRDS.⁹

By voyages in air,
 With constant thought and care,
 Much knowledge had a swallow gained,
 Which she for public use retained :
 The slightest storms she well foreknew,
 And told the sailors ere they blew.
 A farmer sowing hemp, once having found,
 She gathered all the little birds around,

And said, ' My friends, the freedom let me take
To prophesy a little, for your sake,
Against this dangerous seed.
Though such a bird as I
Knows how to hide or fly,
You birds a caution need.
See you that waving hand?
It scatters on the land
What well may cause alarm.
'T will grow to nets and snares,
To catch you unawares
And work you fatal harm !
Great multitudes, I fear,
Of you, my birdies dear,
That falling seed, so little,
Will bring to cage or kettle !
But though so perilous the plot,
You now may easily defeat it :
All 'lighting on the seeded spot,
Just scratch up every seed and eat it.'
The little birds took little heed,
So fed were they with other seed.
Anon the field was seen
Bedecked in tender green.
The swallow's warning voice was heard again :
' My friends, the product of that deadly grain
Seize now, and pull it root by root,
Or surely you 'll repent its fruit.'

'False, babbling prophetess,' says one,
'You 'd set us at some pretty fun !
To pull this field a thousand birds are needed,
While thousands more with hemp are seeded.'

The crop now quite mature,
'The swallow adds, 'Thus far I've failed of
cure ;

I've prophesied in vain
Against this fatal grain :

It's grown. And now, my bonny birds,
Though you have disbelieved my words

Thus far, take heed at last :

When you shall see the seed-time past,
And men, no crops to labour for,
On birds shall wage their cruel war,

With deadly net and noose, —

Of flying then beware,

Unless you take the air

Like woodcock, crane, or goose.

But stop ; you're not in plight

For such adventurous flight,

O'er desert waves and sands,

In search of other lands.

Hence, then, to save your precious souls,

Remaineth but to say,

'T will be the safest way,

To chuck yourselves in holes.'

Before she had thus far gone,

The birdlings, tired of hearing,
 And laughing more than fearing,
 Set up a greater jargon
 Than did, before the Trojan slaughter,
 The Trojans round old Priam's daughter.¹⁰
 And many a bird, in prison grate,
 Lamented soon a Trojan fate.

'T is thus we heed no instincts but our own.
 Believe no evil till the evil's done.

IX.

THE CITY RAT AND THE COUNTRY RAT.¹

A city rat, one night,
 Did, with a civil stoop,
 A country rat invite
 To end a turtle soup.

Upon a Turkey carpet
 They found the table spread,
 And sure I need not harp it
 How well the fellows fed.

The entertainment was
 A truly noble one ;
 But some unlucky cause
 Disturbed it when begun.

It was a slight rat-tat
 That put their joys to rout :
 Out ran the city rat ;
 His guest, too, scampered out.

Our rats but fairly quit,
 The fearful knocking ceased.
 'Return we,' cried the cit,
 'To finish there our feast.'

'No,' said the rustic rat ;
 'To-morrow dine with me.
 I'm not offended at
 Your feast so grand and free, —

'For I've no fare resembling ;
 But then I eat at leisure,
 And would not swap for pleasure
 So mixed with fear and trembling.'

X.

THE WOLF AND THE LAMB.¹²

THAT innocence is not a shield,
 A story teaches, not the longest.
 The strongest reasons always yield
 To reasons of the strongest.

A lamb her thirst was slaking,
 Once, at a mountain rill.
 A hungry wolf was taking
 His hunt for sheep to kill,
 When, spying on the streamlet's brink
 This sheep of tender age,
 He howled in tones of rage,
 'How dare you roil my drink?
 Your impudence I shall chastise!'

'Let not your majesty,' the lamb replies,
 'Decide in haste or passion!
 For sure 't is difficult to think
 In what respect or fashion
 My drinking here could roil your drink,
 Since on the stream your majesty now faces
 I'm lower down, full twenty paces.'

'You roil it,' said the wolf; 'and, more, I know
 You cursed and slandered me a year ago.'

'Oh, no! how could I such a thing have done?
 A lamb that has not seen a year,
 A suckling of its mother dear?'

'Your brother then.' 'But brother I have none.'
 'Well, well, what 's all the same,
 'T was some one of your name.
 Sheep, men, and dogs of every nation
 Are wont to stab my reputation,
 As I have truly heard.'
 Without another word,

He made his vengeance good, —
 Bore off the lambkin to the wood,
 And there, without a jury,
 Judged, slew, and ate her in his fury.

XI.

THE MAN AND HIS IMAGE.¹³

TO M. THE DUC DE LA ROCHEFOUCAULD.

A MAN who had no rivals in the love
 Which to himself he bore,
 Esteemed his own dear beauty far above
 What earth had seen before.
 More than contented in his error,
 He lived the foe of every mirror.
 Officious fate, resolved our lover
 From such an illness should recover,
 Presented always to his eyes
 The mute advisers which the ladies prize, —
 Mirrors in parlours, inns, and shops ;
 Mirrors the pocket furniture of fops ;
 Mirrors on every lady's zone,¹⁴
 From which his face reflected shone.
 What could our dear Narcissus do ?
 From haunts of men he now withdrew,
 On purpose that his precious shape
 From every mirror might escape.

But in his forest glen alone,
Apart from human trace,
A watercourse
Of purest source,
While with unconscious gaze
He pierced its waveless face,
Reflected back his own.

Incensed with mingled rage and fright,
He seeks to shun the odious sight ;
But yet that mirror sheet, so clear and still,
He cannot leave, do what he will.

Ere this, my story's drift you plainly see.
From such mistake there is no mortal free.
That obstinate self-lover
The human soul doth cover ;
The mirror's follies are of others,
In which, as all are genuine brothers,
Each soul may see to life depicted
Itself with just such faults afflicted ;
And by that charming placid brook,
Needless to say, I mean your Maxim Book.

XII.

THE DRAGON WITH MANY HEADS AND
THE DRAGON WITH MANY TAILS.¹⁶

AN envoy of the Porte Sublime,
As history says, once on a time,
Before th' imperial German court ¹⁶
Did rather boastfully report,
The troops commanded by his master's firman,
As being a stronger army than the German :
To which replied a Dutch attendant,
' Our prince has more than one dependant
Who keeps an army at his own expense.'
The Turk, a man of sense,
Rejoined, ' I am aware
What power your emperor's servants share.
It brings to mind a tale both strange and true,
A thing which once, myself, I chanced to view.
I saw come darting through a hedge,
Which fortified a rocky ledge,
A hydra's hundred heads ; and in a trice
My blood was turning into ice.
But less the harm than terror, —
The body came no nearer ;
Nor could, unless it had been sundered,
To parts at least a hundred.

While musing deeply on this sight,
Another dragon came to light,
Whose single head avails
To lead a hundred tails :
And, seized with juster fright,
I saw him pass the hedge, —
Head, body, tails, — a wedge
Of living and resistless powers. —
The other was your emperor's force : this ours.'

XIII.

THE THIEVES AND THE ASS.¹⁷

Two thieves, pursuing their profession,
Had of a donkey got possession,
Whereon a strife arose,
Which went from words to blows.
The question was, to sell, or not to sell ;
But while our sturdy champions fought it well,
Another thief, who chanced to pass,
With ready wit rode off the ass.

This ass is, by interpretation,
Some province poor, or prostrate nation.
The thieves are princes this and that,
On spoils and plunder prone to fat, —

As those of Austria, Turkey, Hungary.
 (Instead of two, I've quoted three, —
 Enough of such commodity.)

These powers engaged in war all,
 Some fourth thief stops the quarrel,
 According all to one key,
 By riding off the donkey.

XIV.

'SIMONIDES PRESERVED BY THE
 GODS.¹⁸

THREE sorts there are, as Malherbe¹⁹ says,
 Which one can never overpraise, —
 The gods, the ladies, and the king ;
 And I, for one, indorse the thing.
 The heart, praise tickles and entices ;
 Of fair one's smile, it oft the price is.
 See how the gods sometimes repay it.
 Simonides — the ancients say it —
 Once undertook, in poem lyric,
 To write a wrestler's panegyric ;
 Which, ere he had proceeded far in,
 He found his subject somewhat barren.
 No ancestors of great renown ;
 His sire of some unnoted town ;

Himself as little known to fame, —
The wrestler's praise was rather tame.
The poet, having made the most of
Whate'er his hero had to boast of,
Digressed, by choice that was not all luck's,
To Castor and his brother Pollux,
Whose bright career was subject ample,
For wrestlers, sure, a good example.
Our poet fattened on their story,
Gave every fight its place and glory,
Till of his panegyric words
These deities had got two-thirds.
All done, the poet's fee
A talent was to be.

But when he comes his bill to settle,
The wrestler, with a spice of mettle,
Pays down a third, and tells the poet,
'The balance they may pay who owe it
The gods than I are rather debtors
To such a pious man of letters.
But still I shall be greatly pleased
To have your presence at my feast,
Among a knot of guests select,
My kin, and friends I most respect.'
More fond of character than coffer,
Simonides accepts the offer.
While at the feast the party sit,
And wine provokes the flow of wit,

It is announced that at the gate
Two men, in haste that cannot wait,
Would see the bard. He leaves the table,
No loss at all to 'ts noisy gabble.
The men were Leda's twins, who knew
What to a poet's praise was due,
And, thanking, paid him by foretelling
The downfall of the wrestler's dwelling.

From which ill-fated pile, indeed,
No sooner was the poet freed,
Than, props and pillars failing,
Which held aloft the ceiling
 So splendid o'er them,
It downward loudly crashed,
The plates and flagons dashed,
 And men who bore them ;
And, what was worse,
Full vengeance for the man of verse,
A timber broke the wrestler's thighs,
And wounded many otherwise.

The gossip Fame, of course, took care
Abroad to publish this affair.

'A miracle !' the public cried, delighted.
No more could god-beloved bard be slighted.
His verse now brought him more than double,
With neither duns, nor care, nor trouble.

Whoe'er laid claim to noble birth
Must buy his ancestors a slice,

Resolved no nobleman on earth
Should overgo him in the price.
From which these serious lessons flow :
Fail not your praises to bestow
On gods and godlike men. Again,
To sell the product of her pain
Is not degrading to the Muse.
Indeed, her art they do abuse
Who think her wares to use,
And yet a liberal pay refuse.
Whate'er the great confer upon her,
They 're honoured by it while they honour.
Of old, Olympus and Parnassus
In friendship heaved their sky-crowned masses.

XV.

DEATH AND THE UNFORTUNATE.²⁰

A POOR unfortunate, from day to day,
Called Death to take him from this world away.
'O Death,' he said, 'to me how fair thy form !
Come quick, and end for me life's cruel storm.'
Death heard, and, with a ghastly grin,
Knocked at his door, and entered in.
With horror, shivering, and affright,
'Take out this object from my sight !'

The poor man loudly cried ;
 'Its dreadful looks I can't abide.
 Oh, stay him, stay him ! let him come no nigher.
 O Death ! O Death ! I pray thee to retire !'

A gentleman of note

In Rome, Mæcenas,²¹ somewhere wrote :
 ' Make me the poorest wretch that begs,
 Sore, hungry, crippled, clothed in rags,
 In hopeless impotence of arms and legs ;
 Provided, after all, you give
 The one sweet liberty to live :
 I 'll ask of Death no greater favour
 Than just to stay away for ever.' }

XVI.

DEATH AND THE WOODMAN.²²

A POOR wood-chopper, with his fagot load,
 Whom weight of years, as well as load, oppressed,
 Sore groaning in his smoky hut to rest,
 Trudged wearily along his homeward road.
 At last his wood upon the ground he throws,
 And sits him down to think o'er all his woes.
 To joy a stranger, since his hapless birth,
 What poorer wretch upon this rolling earth ?
 No bread sometimes, and ne'er a moment's rest ;

Wife, children, soldiers, landlords, public tax,
 All wait the swinging of his old, worn axe,
 And paint the veriest picture of a man unblest.
 On Death he calls. Forthwith that monarch grim
 Appears, and asks what he should do for him.
 'Not much, indeed ; a little help I lack, —
 To put these fagots on my back.'

Death ready stands all ills to cure ;
 But let us not his cure invite.
 Than die, 't is better to endure, —
 Is both a manly maxim and a right.

XVII.

THE MAN BETWEEN TWO AGES, AND
 HIS TWO MISTRESSES.²⁸

A MAN of middle age, whose hair
 Was bordering on the grey,
 Began to turn his thoughts and care
 The matrimonial way.
 By virtue of his ready,
 A store of choices had he
 Of ladies bent to suit his taste ;
 On which account he made no haste.
 To court well was no trifling art.
 Two widows chiefly gained his heart :

The one yet green, the other more mature,
Who found for nature's wane in art a cure.
These dames, amidst their joking and caressing
The man they longed to wed,
Would sometimes set themselves to dressing
His party-coloured head.
Each aiming to assimilate
Her lover to her own estate,
The older piecemeal stole
The black hair from his poll,
While eke, with fingers light,
The young one stole the white.
Between them both, as if by scald,
His head was changed from grey to bald.
'For these,' he said, 'your gentle pranks,
I owe you, ladies, many thanks ;
By being thus well shaved,
I less have lost than saved.
Of Hymen, yet, no news at hand,
I do assure ye.
By what I've lost, I understand
It is in your way,
Not mine, that I must pass on.
Thanks, ladies, for the lesson.'

XVIII.

THE FOX AND THE STORK.²⁴

OLD Mister Fox was at expense, one day,
To dine old Mistress Stork.
The fare was light, was nothing, sooth to say,
Requiring knife and fork.
That sly old gentleman, the dinner-giver,
Was, you must understand, a frugal liver.
This once, at least, the total matter
Was thinnish soup served on a platter,
For madam's slender beak a fruitless puzzle,
Till all had passed the fox's lapping muzzle.
But, little relishing his laughter,
Old gossip Stork, some few days after,
Returned his Foxship's invitation.
Without a moment's hesitation,
He said he 'd go, for he must own he
Ne'er stood with friends for ceremony.
And so, precisely at the hour,
He hied him to the lady's bower ;
Where, praising her politeness,
He finds her dinner right nice.
Its punctuality and plenty,
Its viands, cut in mouthfuls dainty,



“The Boy and the Schoolmaster.”

Its fragrant smell, were powerful to excite,
Had there been need, his foxish appetite.

But now the dame, to torture him,
Such wit was in her,
Served up her dinner

In vases made so tall and slim,
They let their owner's beak pass in and out,
But not, by any means, the fox's snout!

All arts without avail,
With drooping head and tail,
As ought a fox a fowl had cheated,
The hungry guest at last retreated.

Ye knaves, for you is this recital,
You 'll often meet Dame Stork's requital.

XIX.

THE BOY AND THE SCHOOLMASTER.²⁶

Wise counsel is not always wise,
As this my tale exemplifies.

A boy, that frolicked on the banks of Seine,
Fell in, and would have found a watery grave,
Had not that hand that planteth ne'er in vain
A willow planted there, his life to save.

While hanging by its branches as he might,
A certain sage preceptor came in sight ;

To whom the urchin cried, 'Save, or I'm
drowned!'

The master, turning gravely at the sound,
Thought proper for a while to stand aloof,
And give the boy some seasonable reproof.

'You little wretch! this comes of foolish playing,
Commands and precepts disobeying.

A naughty rogue, no doubt, you are,
Who thus requite your parents' care.

Alas! their lot I pity much,
Whom fate condemns to watch o'er such.'

This having coolly said, and more,
He pulled the drowning lad ashore.

This story hits more marks than you suppose.

All critics, pedants, men of endless prose, —

(Three sorts, so richly blessed with progeny,
(The house is blessed that doth not lodge any,—
May in it see themselves from head to toes.

No matter what the task,

Their precious tongues must teach;

Their help in need you ask,

You first must hear them preach.

XX.

THE COCK AND THE PEARL.²⁶

A cock scratched up, one day,
A pearl of purest ray,
Which to a jeweller he bore.
'I think it fine,' he said ;
'But yet a crumb of bread
To me were worth a great deal more.'
So did a dunce inherit
A manuscript of merit,
Which to a publisher he bore.
''T is good,' said he, 'I 'm told ;
Yet any coin of gold
To me were worth a great deal more.'

XXI.

THE HORNETS AND THE BEES.²⁷

'THE artist by his work is known.'—
A piece of honeycomb, one day,
Discovered as a waif and stray,
The hornets treated as their own.
Their title did the bees dispute,
And brought before a wasp the suit.
The judge was puzzled to decide,
For nothing could be testified,

Save that around this honeycomb
 There had been seen, as if at home,
 Some longish, brownish, buzzing creatures,
 Much like the bees in wings and features.
 But what of that? for marks the same,
 The hornets, too, could truly claim.
 Between assertion and denial,
 The wasp, in doubt, proclaimed new trial ;
 And, hearing what an ant-hill swore,
 Could see no clearer than before.
 'What use, I pray, of this expense?'
 At last exclaimed a bee of sense.

'We 've laboured months in this affair,
 And now are only where we were.

Meanwhile the honey runs to waste :
 'T is time the judge should show some haste.
 The parties, sure, have had sufficient bleeding,
 Without more fuss of scrawls and pleading.
 Let 's set ourselves at work, these drones and **we**,
 And then all eyes the truth may plainly see,
 Whose art it is that can produce
 The magic cells, the nectar juice.'

The hornets, flinching on their part,
 Show that the work transcends their art.
 The wasp at length their title sees,
 And gives the honey to the bees.

Would God that suits at law with us
 Might all be managed thus !

That we might, in the Turkish mode,
 Have simple common sense for code !
 They then were short and cheap affairs,
 Instead of stretching on like ditches,
 'Ingulping in their course all riches, —
 The parties leaving, for their shares,
 The shells (and shells there might be moister)
 From which the court has sucked the oyster.²⁸

XXII.

THE OAK AND THE REED.²⁹

THE oak one day addressed the reed :
 'To you ungenerous indeed
 Has nature been, my humble friend,
 With weakness aye obliged to bend.
 The smallest bird that flits in air
 Is quite too much for you to bear ;
 The slightest wind that wreathes the lake
 Your ever-trembling head doth shake.
 The while, my towering form
 Dares with the mountain top
 The solar blaze to stop,
 And wrestle with the storm.
 What seems to you the blast of death
 To me is but a zephyr's breath.
 Beneath my branches had you grown,
 That spread far round their friendly bower,

Less suffering would your life have known,
Defended from the tempest's power.

Unhappily you oftenest shōw
In open air your slender form,
Along the marshes wet and low,
That fringe the kingdom of the storm.
To you, declare I must,
Dame Nature seems unjust.'

Then modestly replied the reed :

'Your pity, sir, is kind indeed,
But wholly needless for my sake.
The wildest wind that ever blew
Is safe to me compared with you.
I bend, indeed, but never break.

Thus far, I own, the hurricane
Has beat your sturdy back in vain ;
But wait the end.' Just at the word,
The tempest's hollow voice was heard.
The North sent forth her fiercest child,
Dark, jagged, pitiless, and wild.
The oak, erect, endured the blow ;
The reed bowed gracefully and low.
But, gathering up its strength once more,
In greater fury than before,

The savage blast
O'erthrew, at last,

That proud old sky-encircled head,
Whose feet entwined the empire of the dead !⁸⁰



BOOK II.

I.

AGAINST THE HARD TO SUIT.¹

WERE I a pet of fair Calliope,
I would devote the gifts conferred on me
To dress in verse old Æsop's lies divine ;
For verse, and they, and truth, do well combine ;
But, not a favourite on the Muses' hill,
I dare not arrogate the magic skill
To ornament these charming stories.
A bard might brighten up their glories,
No doubt. I try, — what one more wise must do.
Thus much I have accomplished hitherto :

 By help of my translation,
 The beasts hold conversation,
In French, as ne'er they did before.
Indeed, to claim a little more,
The plants and trees,² with smiling features,
Are turned by me to talking creatures.
Who says that this is not enchanting?
'Ah,' say the critics, 'hear what vaunting,

From one whose work, all told, no more is
Than half a dozen baby stories ! ' 3

Would you a theme more credible, my cen-
sors,
In graver tone, and style which now and then
soars?

Then list ! For ten long years the men of Troy,
By means that only heroes can employ,
Had held the allied hosts of Greece at bay ;
Their minings, batterings, stormings day by day,
Their hundred battles on the crimson plain,
Their blood of thousand heroes, all in vain, —
When, by Minerva's art, a horse of wood
Of lofty size, before their city stood,
Whose flanks immense the sage Ulysses hold,
Brave Diomed, and Ajax fierce and bold,
Whom, with their Myrmidons, the huge machine
Would bear within the fated town unseen,
To wreak upon its very gods their rage, —
Unheard-of stratagem, in any age,
Which well its crafty authors did repay . . .

' Enough, enough,' our critic folks will say ;

' Your period excites alarm

Lest you should do your lungs some harm ;

And then your monstrous wooden horse,

With squadrons in it at their ease,

Is even harder to indorse

Than Renard cheating Raven of his cheese.

And, more than that, it fits you ill
To wield the old heroic quill.'

Well, then, a humbler tone, if such your will is :
Long sighed and pined the jealous Amaryllis
For her Alcippus, in the sad belief,
None, save her sheep and dog, would know her
grief.

Thyrsis, who knows, among the willows slips,
And hears the gentle shepherdess's lips
Beseech the kind and gentle zephyr
To bear these accents to her lover . . .

'Stop!' says my censor.

'To laws of rhyme quite irreducible,
That couplet needs again the crucible ;

Poetic men, sir,

Must nicely shun the shocks

Of rhymes unorthodox.'

A curse on critics ! hold your tongue !
Know I not how to end my song ?
Of time and strength what greater waste
Than my attempt to suit your taste ?

Some men, more nice than wise,
There 's nought that satisfies.

II.

THE COUNCIL HELD BY THE RATS.⁴

OLD Rodilard,⁵ a certain cat,
Such havoc of the rats had made,
'T was difficult to find a rat
With nature's debt unpaid.
The few that did remain,
To leave their holes afraid,
From usual food abstain,
Not eating half their fill.
And wonder no one will
That one who made of rats his revel,
With rats passed not for cat, but devil.
Now, on a day, this dread rat-eater,
Who had a wife, went out to meet her ;
And while he held his caterwauling,
The unkill'd rats, their chapter calling,
Discussed the point, in grave debate,
How they might shun impending fate.
Their dean, a prudent rat,
Thought best, and better soon than late,
To bell the fatal cat ;
That, when he took his hunting round,
The rats, well cautioned by the sound,
Might hide in safety under ground ;

Indeed, he knew no other means.

And all the rest

At once confessed

Their minds were with the dean's.
No better plan, they all believed,
Could possibly have been conceived ;
No doubt the thing would work right well,
If any one would hang the bell.

But, one by one, said every rat,

'I 'm not so big a fool as that.'

The plan knocked up in this respect,
The council closed without effect.

And many a council I have seen,
Or reverend chapter with its dean,
That, thus resolving wisely,
Fell through like this precisely.

To argue or refute,

Wise counsellors abound ;

The man to execute

Is harder to be found.

III.

THE WOLF ACCUSING THE FOX
BEFORE THE MONKEY.⁶

A WOLF, affirming his belief
 That he had suffered by a thief,
 Brought up his neighbour fox —
 Of whom it was by all confessed,
 His character was not the best —
 To fill the prisoner's box.
 As judge between these vermin,
 A monkey graced the ermine ;
 And truly other gifts of Themis⁷
 Did scarcely seem his ;
 For while each party plead his cause,
 Appealing boldly to the laws,
 And much the question vexed,
 Our monkey sat perplexed.

Their words and wrath expended,
 Their strife at length was ended ;
 When, by their malice taught,
 The judge this judgment brought :
 'Your characters, my friends, I long have known,
 As on this trial clearly shown ;
 And hence I fine you both, — the grounds at large
 To state would little profit, —

You, wolf, in short, as bringing groundless charge,
You, fox, as guilty of it.'
Come at it right or wrong, the judge opined
No other than a villain could be fined.⁸

IV.

THE TWO BULLS AND THE FROG.⁹

Two bulls engaged in shocking battle,
Both for a certain heifer's sake,
And lordship over certain cattle.
A frog began to groan and quake.
'But what is this to you?'
Inquired another of the croaking crew.
'Why, sister, don't you see,
The end of this will be
That one of these big brutes will yield,
And then be exiled from the field?
No more permitted on the grass to feed,
He'll forage through our marsh, on rush and reed ;
And while he eats or chews the cud,
Will trample on us in the mud.
Alas ! to think how frogs must suffer
By means of this proud lady heifer !'
This fear was not without good sense.
One bull was beat, and much to their expense ;

For, quick retreating to their reedy bower,
He trod on twenty of them in an hour.

Of little folks it oft has been the fate
To suffer for the follies of the great.

V.

THE BAT AND THE TWO WEASELS.¹⁰

A BLUNDERING bat once stuck her head
Into a wakeful weasel's bed ;
Whereat the mistress of the house,
A deadly foe of rats and mice,
Was making ready in a trice
To eat the stranger as a mouse.

'What! do you dare,' she said, 'to creep in
The very bed I sometimes sleep in,
Now, after all the provocation
I've suffered from your thievish nation?
Are you not really a mouse,
That gnawing pest of every house,
Your special aim to do the cheese ill?
Ay, that you are, or I'm no weasel.'

'I beg your pardon,' said the bat ;
'My kind is very far from that.
What! I a mouse! Who told you such a lie?
Why, ma'am, I am a bird ;
And, if you doubt my word,

Just see the wings with which I fly.
 Long live the mice that cleave the sky !'
 These reasons had so fair a show,
 The weasel let the creature go.

By some strange fancy led,
 The same wise blunderhead,
 But two or three days later,
 Had chosen for her rest
 Another weasel's nest, —
 This last, of birds a special hater.

New peril brought this step absurd :
 Without a moment's thought or puzzle,
 Dame weasel oped her peaked muzzle
 To eat the intruder as a bird.

'Hold ! do not wrong me,' cried the bat ;
 'I'm truly no such thing as that.

Your eyesight strange conclusions gathers.
 What makes a bird, I pray ? Its feathers.

I'm cousin of the mice and rats.

Great Jupiter confound the cats !'

The bat, by such adroit replying,
 Twice saved herself from dying.

And many a human stranger
 Thus turns his coat in danger ;
 And sings, as suits, where'er he goes,
 'God save the king !' — or 'save his foes !' ^u

VI.

THE BIRD WOUNDED BY AN ARROW.¹²

A BIRD, with plumèd arrow shot,
 In dying case deplored her lot :
 ‘ Alas ! ’ she cried, ‘ the anguish of the thought !
 This ruin partly by myself was brought !
 Hard-hearted men, from us to borrow
 What wings to us the fatal arrow !
 But mock us not, ye cruel race,
 For you must often take our place.’

The work of half the human brothers
 Is making arms against the others.

VII.

THE BITCH AND HER FRIEND.¹³

A BITCH that felt her time approaching,
 And had no place for parturition,
 Went to a female friend, and, broaching
 Her delicate condition,
 Got leave herself to shut
 Within the other’s hut.
 At proper time the lender came
 Her little premises to claim.

The bitch crawled meekly to the door,
And humbly begged a fortnight more.
Her little pups, she said, could hardly walk.
In short, the lender yielded to her talk.
The second term expired ; the friend had come
To take possession of her house and home.
The bitch, this time, as if she would have bit her,
Replied, ' I 'm ready, madam, with my litter,
To go when you can turn me out.'
Her pups, you see, were fierce and stout.

The creditor, from whom a villain borrows,
Will fewer shillings get again than sorrows.
If you have trusted people of this sort,
You 'll have to plead and dun and fight ; in short,
If in your house you let one step a foot,
He 'll surely step the other in to boot.

VIII.

THE EAGLE AND THE BEETLE.¹⁴

JOHN RABBIT, by Dame Eagle chased,
Was making for his hole in haste,
When, on his way, he met a beetle's burrow.
I leave you all to think
If such a little chink
Could to a rabbit give protection thorough.

But, since no better could be got,
John Rabbit there was fain to squat.
Of course, in an asylum so absurd,
John felt ere long the talons of the bird.
But first the beetle, interceding, cried,
'Great queen of birds, it cannot be denied
that, maugre my protection, you can bear
My trembling guest, John Rabbit, through the air.
But do not give me such affront, I pray ;
And since he craves your grace,
In pity of his case,
Grant him his life, or take us both away ;
For he 's my gossip, friend, and neighbour.'
In vain the beetle's friendly labour ;
The eagle clutched her prey without reply,
And as she flapped her vasty wings to fly,
Struck down our orator and stilled him, —
'The wonder is she had n't killed him.
The beetle soon, of sweet revenge in quest,
Flew to the old, gnarled mountain oak,
Which proudly bore that haughty eagle's nest.
And while the bird was gone,
Her eggs, her cherished eggs, he broke,
Not sparing one.
Returning from her flight, the eagle's cry
Of rage and bitter anguish filled the sky.
But, by excess of passion blind,
Her enemy she failed to find.

Her wrath in vain, that year it was her fate
To live a mourning mother, desolate.

The next, she built a loftier nest ; 't was vain ;
The beetle found and dashed her eggs again.

John Rabbit's death was thus revenged anew.
The second mourning for her murdered brood
Was such that through the giant mountain wood,
For six long months, the sleepless echo flew.

The bird, once Ganymede, now made
Her prayer to Jupiter for aid ;
And, laying them within his godship's lap,
She thought her eggs now safe from all mishap :
The god his own could not but make them, —
No wretch would venture there to break them.

And no one did. Their enemy, this time,
Upsoaring to a place sublime,
Let fall upon his royal robes some dirt,
Which Jove just shaking, with a sudden flirt,
Threw out the eggs, no one knows whither.

When Jupiter informed her how th' event
Occurred by purest accident,
The eagle raved ; there was no reasoning with
her ;
She gave out threats of leaving court,
To make the desert her resort,
And other brav'ries of this sort.
Poor Jupiter in silence heard
The uproar of his favourite bird.

Before his throne the beetle now appeared,
 And by a clear complaint the mystery cleared.
 The god pronounced the eagle in the wrong.
 But still, their hatred was so old and strong,
 These enemies could not be reconciled ;
 And, that the general peace might not be spoiled, —
 The best that he could do, — the god arranged
 That thence the eagle's pairing should be changed,
 To come when beetle folks are only found
 Concealed and dormant under ground.

IX.

THE LION AND THE GNAT.¹⁵

'Go, paltry insect, nature's meanest brat !'
 Thus said the royal lion to the gnat.
 The gnat declared immediate war.
 'Think you,' said he, 'your royal name
 To me worth caring for?
 Think you I tremble at your power or fame?
 The ox is bigger far than you,
 Yet him I drive, and all his crew.'
 This said, as one that did no fear owe,
 Himself he blew the battle charge,
 Himself both trumpeter and hero.
 At first he played about at large,

Then on the lion's neck, at leisure, settled,
And there the royal beast full sorely nettled.

With foaming mouth and flashing eye,
He roars. All creatures hide or fly, —
Such mortal terror at

The work of one poor gnat !

With constant change of his attack,
The snout now stinging, now the back,
And now the chambers of the nose,
The pigmy fly no mercy shows.

The lion's rage was at its height ;
His viewless foe now laughed outright,
When on his battle-ground he saw
That every savage tooth and claw
Had got its proper beauty
By doing bloody duty ;

Himself, the hapless lion, tore his hide,
And lashed with sounding tail from side to side.

Ah, bootless blow and bite and curse !

He beat the harmless air, and worse ;

For, though so fierce and stout,

By effort wearied out,

He fainted, fell, gave up the quarrel.

The gnat retires with verdant laurel.

Now rings his trumpet-clang,

As at the charge it rang.

But while his triumph note he blows,

Straight on our valiant conqueror goes,

A spider's ambuscade to meet,
And make its web his winding-sheet.

We often have the most to fear
From those we most despise ;
Again, great risks a man may clear,
Who by the smallest dies.

X.

THE ASS LOADED WITH SPONGES, AND
THE ASS LOADED WITH SALT.¹⁶

A MAN, whom I shall call an ass-eteer,
His sceptre like some Roman emperor bearing,
Drove on two coursers of protracted ear,
The one, with sponges laden, briskly faring ;
The other lifting legs
As if he trod on eggs,
With constant need of goading,
And bags of salt for loading.
J'er hill and dale our merry pilgrims passed,
Till, coming to a river's ford at last,
They stopped quite puzzled on the shore.
Our asseteer had crossed the stream before ;
So, on the lighter beast astride,
He drives the other, spite of dread,
Which, loath indeed to go ahead,
Into a deep hole turns aside,

And, facing right about,
 Where he went in, comes out ;
 For duckings two or three
 Had power the salt to melt,
 So that the creature felt
 His burdened shoulders free.
 The sponger, like a sequent sheep,
 Pursuing through the water deep,
 Into the same hole plunges
 Himself, his rider, and the sponges.
 All three drank deeply ; aseteer and ass
 For boon companions of their load might pass ;
 Which last became so sore a weight,
 The ass fell down,
 Belike to drown,
 His rider risking equal fate.
 A helper came, no matter who.
 The moral needs no more ado :
 That all can't act alike, —
 The point I wished to strike.

XI.

THE LION AND THE RAT.¹⁷

To show to all your kindness, it behoves :
 There 's none so small but you his aid may need
 I quote two fables for this weighty creed,
 Which either of them fully proves.

From underneath the sword
A rat, quite off his guard,
Popped out between a lion's paws.
The beast of royal bearing
Showed what a lion was,
The creature's life by sparing, —
A kindness well repaid ;
For, little as you would have thought
His majesty would ever need his aid,
It proved full soon
A precious boon.
Forth issuing from his forest glen,
T' explore the haunts of men,
In lion net his majesty was caught,
From which his strength and rage
Served not to disengage.
The rat ran up, with grateful glee,
Gnawed off a rope, and set him free.
By time and toil we sever
What strength and rage could never.

XII.

THE DOVE AND THE ANT.¹²

THE same instruction we may get
From another couple, smaller yet.
A dove came to a brook to drink,
When, leaning o'er its crumbling brink,

An ant fell in, and vainly tried,
 In this, to her, an ocean tide,
 To reach the land ; whereat the dove,
 With every living thing in love,
 Was prompt a spire of grass to throw her
 By which the ant regained the shore.

A barefoot scamp, both mean and sly,
 Soon after chanced this dove to spy ;
 And, being armed with bow and arrow,
 The hungry codger doubted not
 The bird of Venus, in his pot,
 Would make a soup before the morrow.
 Just as his deadly bow he drew,
 Our ant just bit his heel.
 Roused by the villain's squeal,
 The dove took timely hint, and flew
 Far from the rascal's coop :
 And with her flew his soup.

XIII.

THE ASTROLOGER WHO STUMBLED
 INTO A WELL.¹⁹

To an astrologer who fell
 Plump to the bottom of a well,
 ' Poor blockhead ! ' cried a passer-by,
 ' Not see your feet, and read the sky ? '

This upshot of a story will suffice
To give a useful hint to most ;
For few there are in this our world so wise
As not to trust in star or ghost,
Or cherish secretly the creed
That men the book of destiny may read.
This book, by Homer and his pupils sung,
What is it, in plain common-sense,
But what was chance those ancient folks among,
And with ourselves, God's providence ?
Now chance doth bid defiance
To everything like science ;
'T were wrong, if not,
To call it hazard, fortune, lot, —
Things palpably uncertain.
But from the purposes divine,
The deep of infinite design,
Who boasts to lift the curtain ?
Whom but himself doth God allow
To read his bosom thoughts ? and how
Would he imprint upon the stars sublime
The shrouded secrets of the night of time ?
And all for what ? To exercise the wit
Of those who on astrology have writ ?
To help us shun inevitable ills ?
To poison for us even pleasure's rills ?
The choicest blessings to destroy,
Exhausting, ere they come, their joy ?

Such faith is worse than error, — 't is a crime.
The sky-host moves, and marks the course of
time ;

The sun sheds on our nicely-measured days
The glory of his night-dispelling rays ;
And all from this we can divine
Is, that they need to rise and shine, —
To roll the seasons, ripen fruits,
And cheer the hearts of men and brutes.
How tallies this revolving universe
With human things, eternally diverse ?

Ye horoscopers, waning quacks,
Please turn on Europe's courts your backs,
And, taking on your travelling lists
The bellows-blowing alchemists,
Budge off together to the land of mists.

But I've digressed. Return we now, bethink-
ing

Of our poor star-man, whom we left a drinking.
Besides the folly of his lying trade,
This man the type may well be made
Of those who at chimeras stare
When they should mind the things that are.

XIV.

THE HARE AND THE FROGS.²⁰

ONCE in his bed deep mused the hare
 (What else but muse could he do there?),
 And soon by gloom was much afflicted :
 To gloom the creature 's much addicted.
 ' Alas ! these constitutions nervous,'
 He cried, ' how wretchedly they serve us :
 We timid people, by their action,
 Can't eat nor sleep with satisfaction ;
 We can't enjoy a pleasure single,
 But with some misery it must mingle.
 Myself, for one, am forced by cursed fear
 To sleep with open eye as well as ear.
 " Correct yourself," says some adviser.
 Grows fear, by such advice, the wiser ?
 Indeed, I well enough descry
 That men have fear, as well as I.'
 With such revolving thoughts our hare
 Kept watch in soul-consuming care.
 A passing shade or leaflet's quiver
 Would give his blood a boiling fever.
 Full soon, his melancholy soul
 Aroused from dreaming doze
 By noise too slight for foes,
 He scuds in haste to reach his hole.

He passed a pond ; and from its border bogs,
Plunge after plunge, in leaped the timid frogs.

‘Aha ! I do to them, I see,’

He cried, ‘ what others do to me.

The sight of even me, a hare,
Sufficeth some, I find, to scare.

And here, the terror of my tramp
Hath put to rout, it seems, a camp.

The trembling fools ! they take me for
The very thunderbolt of war !

I see, the coward never skulked a foe

That might not scare a coward still below.

XV.

THE COCK AND THE FOX.²¹

UPON a tree there mounted guard

A veteran cock, adroit and cunning ;

When to the roots a fox, up running,

Spoke thus, in tones of kind regard :

‘ Our quarrel, brother, ’s at an end ;

Henceforth I hope to live your friend :

For peace now reigns

Throughout the animal domains.

I bear the news : come down, I pray,

And give me the embrace fraternal ;

And please, my brother, don’t delay.

So much the tidings do concern all,
 That I must spread them far to-day.
 Now you and yours can take your walks
 Without a fear or thought of hawks. ||
 And should you clash with them or others,
 In us you 'll find the best of brothers ; —
 For which you may, this joyful night,
 Your merry bonfires light.
 But, first, let 's seal the bliss
 With one fraternal kiss.
 ' Good friend,' the cock replied, ' upon my word,
 A better thing I never heard ;
 And doubly I rejoice
 To hear it from your voice ;
 And really there must be something in it,
 For yonder come two greyhounds, which I flatter
 Myself are couriers on this very matter.
 They come so fast, they 'll be here in a minute.
 I 'll down, and all of us will seal the blessing
 With general kissing and caressing.'
 ' Adieu !' said fox ; ' my errand 's pressing ;
 I 'll hurry on my way,
 And we 'll rejoice some other day.'
 So off the fellow scampered, quick and light,
 To gain the fox-holes of a neighbouring height,
 Less happy in his stratagem than flight.
 The cock laughed sweetly in his sleeve :
 'T is doubly sweet deceiver to deceive.

XVI.

THE RAVEN WISHING TO IMITATE
THE EAGLE.²³

THE bird of Jove bore off a mutton,
A raven being witness.
That weaker bird, but equal glutton,
Not doubting of his fitness
To do the same with ease,
And bent his taste to please,
Took round the flock his sweep,
And marked among the sheep
The one of fairest flesh and size,
A real sheep of sacrifice, —
A dainty titbit bestial,
Reserved for mouth celestial.
Our gormand, gloating round,
Cried, 'Sheep, I wonder much
Who could have made you such.
You 're far the fattest I have found ;
I 'll take you for my eating.'
And on the creature bleating
He settled down. Now, sooth to say,
This sheep would weigh
More than a cheese ;
And had a fleece

Much like that matting famous
 Which graced the chin of Polyphemus ;²⁸
 So fast it clung to every claw,
 It was not easy to withdraw.

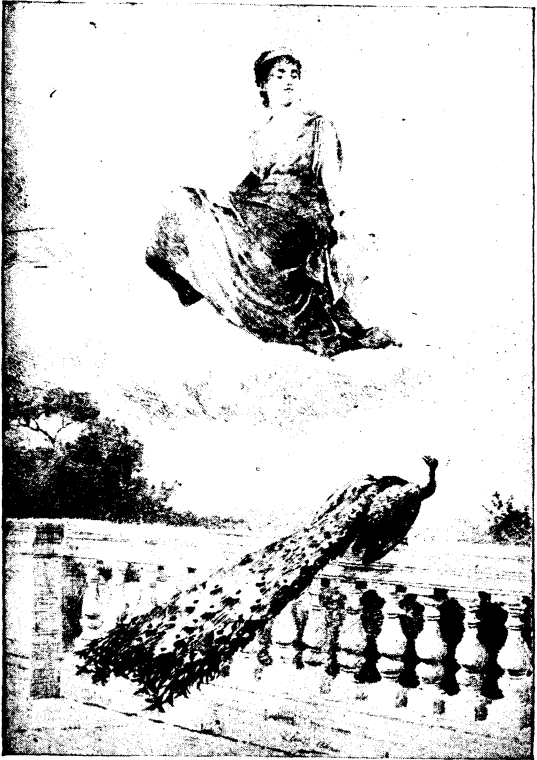
The shepherd came, caught, caged, and, to their joy,
 Gave croaker to his children for a toy.

Ill plays the pilferer the bigger thief ;
 One's self one ought to know ; — in brief,
 Example is a dangerous lure ;
 Death strikes the gnat, where flies the wasp secure.

XVII.

THE PEACOCK COMPLAINING TO JUNO.²⁴

THE peacock²⁵ to the queen of heaven
 Complained in some such words :
 ' Great goddess, you have given
 To me, the laughing-stock of birds,
 A voice which fills, by taste quite just,
 All nature with disgust ;
 Whereas that little paltry thing,
 The nightingale, pours from her throat
 So sweet and ravishing a note,
 She bears alone the honours of the spring.'



“The Peacock complaining to Juno.”

In anger Juno heard,
And crièd, ' Shame on you, jealous bird !
Grudge you the nightingale her voice,
Whø in the rainbow neck rejoice,
Than costliest silks more richly tinted,
In charms of grace and form unstinted, —
Who strut in kingly pride,
Your glorious tail spread wide
With brilliants which in sheen do
Outshine the jeweller's bow window ?
Is there a bird beneath the blue
That has more charms than you ?
No animal in everything can shine.
By just partition of our gifts divine,
Each has its full and proper share :
Among the birds that cleave the air,
The hawk 's a swift, the eagle is a brave one,
For omens serves the hoarse old raven,
The rook 's of coming ills the prophet ;
And if there 's any discontent,
I 've heard not of it.
Cease, then, your envious complaint ;
Or I, instead of making up your lack,
Will take your boasted plumage from your back.'

XVIII.

THE CAT METAMORPHOSED INTO A
WOMAN.²⁶

A BACHELOR caressed his cat,
A darling, fair, and delicate ;
So deep in love, he thought her mew
The sweetest voice he ever knew.

By prayers and tears and magic art
The man got Fate to take his part ;
And, lo ! one morning at his side
His cat, transformed, became his bride.
In wedded state our man was seen
The fool in courtship he had been.
No lover e'er was so bewitched

By any maiden's charms
As was this husband, so enriched
By hers within his arms.
He praised her beauties, this and that,
And saw there nothing of the cat.

In short, by passion's aid, he
Thought her a perfect lady.

'T was night : some carpet-gnawing mice
Disturbed the nuptial joys.

Excited by the noise,
The bride sprang at them in a trice ;

The mice were scared and fled.
The bride, scarce in her bed,
The gnawing heard, and sprang again, —
And this time not in vain,
For, in this novel form arrayed,
Of her the mice were less afraid.
Through life she loved this mousing course,
So great is stubborn nature's force.

In mockery of change, the old
Will keep their youthful bent.
When once the cloth has got its fold,
The smelling-pot its scent,
In vain your efforts and your care
To make **them** other than they are.
To work reform, do what you will,
Old habit will be habit still.
Nor fork ²⁷ nor strap can mend its manners,
Nor cudgel-blows beat down its banners.
Secure the doors against the renter,
And through the windows it will enter.

XIX.

THE LION AND THE ASS HUNTING.²⁵

THE king of animals, with royal grace,
Would celebrate his birthday in the chase.

'T was not with bow and arrows,
To slay some wretched sparrows ;

The lion hunts the wild boar of the wood,
The antlered deer and stags, the fat and good.

This time, the king, t' insure success,

Took for his aide-de-camp an ass,

A creature of stentorian voice,

That felt much honoured by the choice.

The lion hid him in a proper station,

And ordered him to bray, for his vocation,

Assured that his tempestuous cry

The boldest beasts would terrify,

And cause them from their lairs to fly.

And, sooth, the horrid noise the creature made

Did strike the tenants of the wood with dread ;

And, as they headlong fled,

All fell within the lion's ambushade.

'Has not my service glorious

Made both of us victorious ?'

Cried out the much-elated ass.

'Yes,' said the lion ; 'bravely brayed !

Had I not known yourself and race,
 I should have been myself afraid !'
 If he had dared, the donkey
 Had shown himself right spunky
 At this retort, though justly made ;
 For who could suffer boasts to pass
 So ill-befitting to an ass ?

XX.

THE WILL EXPLAINED BY ÆSOP.²⁰

IF what old story says of Æsop's true,
 The oracle of Greece he was,
 And more than Areopagus³⁰ he knew,
 With all its wisdom in the laws.
 The following tale gives but a sample
 Of what has made his fame so ample.
 Three daughters shared a father's purse,
 Of habits totally diverse.
 The first, bewitched with drinks delicious ;
 The next, coquettish and capricious ;
 The third, supremely avaricious.
 The sire, expectant of his fate,
 Bequeathed his whole estate,
 In equal shares, to them,
 And to their mother just the same, —

To her then payable, and not before,
Each daughter should possess her part no **more**.
 The father died. The females three
 Were much in haste the will to see.
 They read, and read, but still
 Saw not the willer's will.
 For could it well be understood
 That each of this sweet sisterhood,
 When she possessed her part no more,
 Should to her mother pay it o'er?
 'T was surely not so easy saying
 How lack of means would help the paying.
 What meant their honoured father, then?
 Th' affair was brought to legal men,
 Who, after turning o'er the case
 Some hundred thousand different ways,
 Threw down the learned bonnet,
 Unable to decide upon it ;
 And then advised the heirs,
 Without more thought, t' adjust affairs.
 As to the widow's share, the counsel say,
 ' We hold it just the daughters each should pay
 One third to her upon demand,
 Should she not choose to have it stand
 Commuted as a life annuity,
Paid from her husband's death, with due con-
 gruity.'
 The thing thus ordered, the estate

Is duly cut in portions three.
And in the first they all agree
To put the feasting-lodges, plate,
Luxurious cooling mugs,
Enormous liquor jugs,
Rich cupboards, — built beneath the trellised
vine, —

The stores of ancient, sweet Malvoisian wine,

The slaves to serve it at a sign ;

In short, whatever, in a great house,

There is of feasting apparatus.

The second part is made

Of what might help the jilting trade, —

The city house and furniture,

Exquisite and genteel, be sure,

The eunuchs, milliners, and laces,

The jewels, shawls, and costly dresses.

The third is made of household stuff,

More vulgar, rude, and rough, —

Farms, fences, flocks, and fodder,

And men and beasts to turn the sod o'er.

This done, since it was thought

To give the parts by lot

Might suit, or it might not,

Each paid her share of fees dear,

And took the part that pleased her.

'T was in great Athens town,

Such judgment gave the gown.

And there the public voice
Applauded both the judgment and the choice.
But Æsop well was satisfied
The learned men had set aside,
In judging thus the testament,
The very gist of its intent.
‘The dead,’ quoth he, ‘could he but know
of it,
Would heap reproaches on such Attic wit.
What ! men who proudly take their place
As sages of the human race,
Lack they the simple skill
To settle such a will?’
This said, he undertook himself
The task of portioning the pelf ;
And straightway gave each maid the part
The least according to her heart, —
The prim coquette, the drinking stuff ;
The drinker, then, the farms and cattle ;
And on the miser, rude and rough,
The robes and lace did Æsop settle :
For thus, he said, ‘an early date
Would see the sisters alienate
Their several shares of the estate.
No motive now in maidenhood to tarry,
They all would seek, post haste, to marry ;
And, having each a splendid bait,
Each soon would find a well-bred mate ;

And, leaving thus their father's goods intact,
Would to their mother pay them all, in fact,' —

Which of the testament

Was plainly the intent.

The people, who had thought a slave an ass,

Much wondered how it came to pass

That one alone should have more sense

Than all their men of most pretence.





BOOK III.

I.

THE MILLER, HIS SON, AND THE ASS.¹

TO M. DE MAUCROIX.²

BECAUSE the arts are plainly birthright matters,
For fables we to ancient Greece are debtors ;
But still this field could not be reaped so clean
As not to let us, later comers, glean.
The fiction-world hath deserts yet to dare,
And, daily, authors make discoveries there.
I 'd fain repeat one which our man of song,
Old Malherbe, told one day to young Racan.³
Of Horace they the rivals and the heirs,
Apollo's pets, — my masters, I should say, —
Sole by themselves were met, I 'm told, one day,
Confiding each to each their thoughts and cares.
Racan begins : ' Pray end my inward strife,
For well you know, my friend, what 's what in life,

Who through its varied course, from stage to stage,
 Have stored the full experience of age ;
 What shall I do? 'T is time I chose profession.
 You know my fortune, birth, and disposition.
 Ought I to make the country my resort,
 Or seek the army, or to rise at court?
 There 's nought but mixeth bitterness with charms ;
 War hath its pleasures, hymen its alarms.
 'T were nothing hard to take my natural bent, —
 But I 've a world of people to content.'
 'Content a world !' old Malherbe cries ; ' who can,
 sir ?

Why, let me tell a story ere I answer.

'A miller and his son, I 've somewhere read,
 The first in years, the other but a lad, —
 A fine, smart boy, however, I should say, —
 To sell their ass went to a fair one day.
 In order there to get the highest price,
 They needs must keep their donkey fresh and
 nice ;
 So, tying fast his feet, they swung him clear,
 And bore him hanging like a chandelier.
 Alas ! poor, simple-minded country fellows !
 The first that sees their load, loud laughing, bel-
 lows,
 " What farce is this to split good people's sides ?
 The most an ass is not the one that rides ! "

The miller, much enlightened by this talk,
Untied his precious beast, and made him walk.
The ass, who liked the other mode of travel,
Brayed some complaint at trudging on the gravel ;
Whereat, not understanding well the beast,
The miller caused his hopeful son to ride,
And walked behind, without a spark of pride.
Three merchants passed, and, mightily displeas'd,
The eldest of these gentlemen cried out,

“ Ho, there ! dismount, for shame, you lubber
lout !

Nor make a footboy of your grey-beard sire ;
Change places, as the rights of age require.”

“ To please you, sirs,” the miller said, “ I ought.”
So down the young and up the old man got.
Three girls next passing, “ What a shame !” says
one,

“ That boy should be oblig'd on foot to run,
While that old chap, upon his ass astride,
Should play the calf, and like a bishop ride !”

“ Please save your wit,” the miller made reply ;
“ Tough veal, my girls, the calf as old as I.”
But joke on joke repeated changed his mind ;
So up he took, at last, his son behind.

Not thirty yards ahead, another set
Found fault. “ The biggest fools I ever met,”
Says one of them, “ such burdens to impose.
The ass is faint, and dying with their blows.

Is this, indeed, the mercy which these rustics
Show to their honest, faithful old domestics?
If to the fair these lazy fellows ride,
"T will be to sell thereat the donkey's hide!"
"Zounds!" cried the miller, "precious little brains
Hath he who takes, to please the world, such
pains;
But since we're in, we'll try what can be
done."

So off the ass they jumped, himself and son,
And, like a prelate, donkey marched alone.
Another man they met. "These folks," said he,
"Enslave themselves to let their ass go free,
The darling brute! If I might be so bold,
I'd counsel them to have him set in gold.
Not so went Nicholas his Jane⁴ to woo,
Who rode, we sing, his ass to save his shoe."
"Ass! ass!" our man replied; "we're asses
three!

I do avow myself an ass to be;
But since my sage advisers can't agree,
Their words henceforth shall not be heeded;
I'll suit myself." And he succeeded.

' For you, choose army, love, or court;
In town or country make resort;
Take wife or cowl; ride you, or walk;
Doubt not but tongues will have their talk.'

II.

THE MEMBERS AND THE BELLY.⁵

PERHAPS, had I but shown due loyalty,
 This book would have begun with royalty,
 Of which, in certain points of view,
 Boss⁶ Belly is the image true,
 In whose bereavements all the members share :
 Of whom the latter once so weary were,
 As all due service to forbear,
 On what they called his idle plan,
 Resolved to play the gentleman,
 And let his lordship live on air.
 ‘Like burden-beasts,’ said they,
 ‘We sweat from day to day ;
 And all for whom, and what?
 Ourselves we profit not.
 Our labour has no object but one,
 That is, to feed this lazy glutton.
 We ’ll learn the resting trade
 By his example’s aid.’
 So said, so done ; all labour ceased ;
The hands refused to grasp, the arms to strike ;
 All other members did the like.
 Their boss might labour if he pleased !

It was an error which they soon repented,
With pain of languid poverty acquainted.

The heart no more the blood renewed,
And hence repair no more accrued
To ever-wasting strength ;
Whereby the mutineers, at length,
Saw that the idle belly, in its way,
Did more for common benefit than they.

For royalty our fable makes,
A thing that gives as well as takes
Its power all labour to sustain,
Nor for themselves turns out their labour vain.
It gives the artist bread, the merchant riches ;
Maintains the diggers in their ditches ;
Pays man of war and magistrate ;
Supports the swarms in place,
That live on sovereign grace ;
In short, is caterer for the state.

Menenius⁷ told the story well :
When Rome, of old, in pieces fell,
The commons parting from the senate.
'The ills,' said they, 'that we complain at
Are, that the honours, treasures, power, and
dignity,
Belong to them alone ; while we
Get nought our labour for
But tributes, taxes, and fatigues of war.'

Without the walls the people had their stand,
Prepared to march in search of other land,
When by this noted fable
Menenius was able
To draw them, hungry, home
To duty and to Rome ⁸

III.

THE WOLF TURNED SHEPHERD.⁹

A WOLF, whose gettings from the flocks
Began to be but few,
Bethought himself to play the fox
In character quite new.
A shepherd's hat and coat he took,
A cudgel for a crook,
Nor e'en the pipe forgot ;
And more to seem what he was not,
Himself upon his hat he wrote,
'I'm Willie, shepherd of these sheep.'
His person thus complete,
His crook in upraised feet,
The impostor Willie stole upon the keep.
The real Willie, on the grass asleep,
Slept there, indeed, profoundly,
His dog and pipe slept, also soundly ;
His drowsy sheep around lay.

As for the greatest number,
 Much blessed the hypocrite their slumber,
 And hoped to drive away the flock,
 Could he the shepherd's voice but mock.

He thought undoubtedly he could.
 He tried : the tone in which he spoke,
 Loud echoing from the wood,
 The plot and slumber broke ;
 Sheep, dog, and man awoke.
 The wolf, in sorry plight,
 In hampering coat bedight,
 Could neither run nor fight.

There 's always leakage of deceit
 Which makes it never safe to cheat.
 Whoever is a wolf had better
 Keep clear of hypocritic fetter.

IV.

THE FROGS ASKING A KING.¹⁰

A CERTAIN commonwealth aquatic,
 Grown tired of order democratic,
 By clamouring in the ears of Jove, effected
 Its being to a monarch's power subjected.
 Jove flung it down, at first, a king pacific,
 Who nathless fell with such a splash terrific,

The marshy folks, a foolish race and timid,
 Made breathless haste to get from him hid.
 They dived into the mud beneath the water,
 Or found among the reeds and rushes quarter.

And long it was they dared not see
 The dreadful face of majesty,
 Supposing that some monstrous frog
 Had been sent down to rule the bog.

{ The king was really a log,
 { Whose gravity inspired with awe
 { The first that, from his hiding-place
 { Forth venturing, astonished, saw
 { The royal blockhead's face.

With trembling and with fear,
 At last he drew quite near.

Another followed, and another yet,
 Till quite a crowd at last were met ;
 Who, growing fast and strangely bolder,
 Perched soon upon the royal shoulder.
 His gracious majesty kept still,
 And let his people work their will.

Clack, clack ! what din beset the ears of
 Jove ?

‘ We want a king,’ the people said, ‘ to move !’

The god straight sent them down a crane,
 Who caught and slew them without measure,
 And gulped their carcasses at pleasure ;
 Whereat the frogs more wofully complain.

'What! what!' great Jupiter replied;
 'By your desires must I be tied?
 Think you such government is bad?
 You should have kept what first you had;
 Which having blindly failed to do,
 It had been prudent still for you
 To let that former king suffice,
 More meek and mild, if not so wise.
 With this now make yourselves content,
 Lest for your sins a worse be sent.'

V.

THE FOX AND THE GOAT.¹¹

A FOX once journeyed, and for company
 A certain bearded, horned goat had he;
 Which goat no further than his nose could see,
 The fox was deeply versed in trickery.
 These travellers did thirst compel
 To seek the bottom of a well.
 There, having drunk enough for two,
 Says fox, 'My friend, what shall we do?
 'T is time that we were thinking
 Of something else than drinking.
 Raise you your feet upon the wall,
 And stick your horns up straight and tall;

Then up your back I'll climb with ease,
And draw you after, if you please.'

'Yes, by my beard,' the other said,
'Tis just the thing. I like a head
Well stocked with sense, like thine.

Had it been left to mine,
I do confess,

I never should have thought of this,
So Renard clambered out,
And, leaving there the goat,
Discharged his obligations
By preaching thus on patience :

'Had Heaven put sense thy head within,
To match the beard upon thy chin,
Thou wouldst have thought a bit,
Before descending such a pit.

I'm out of it; good bye :
With prudent effort try
Yourself to extricate.

For me, affairs of state
Permit me not to wait.'

[Whatever way you wend,
Consider well the end.]

VI.

THE EAGLE, THE WILD SOW, AND
THE CAT.¹²

A CERTAIN hollow tree
Was tenanted by three.
An eagle held a lofty bough,
The hollow root a wild wood sow,
A female cat between the two.
All busy with maternal labours,
They lived awhile obliging neighbours.
At last the cat's deceitful tongue
Broke up the peace of old and young.
Up climbing to the eagle's nest,
She said, with whiskered lips compressed,
'Our death, or, what as much we mothers fear,
That of our helpless offspring dear,
Is surely drawing near.
Beneath our feet, see you not how
Destruction's plotted by the sow?
Her constant digging, soon or late,
Our proud old castle will uproot.
And then — oh, sad and shocking fate! —
She'll eat our young ones, as the fruit!
Were there but hope of saving one,
'T would soothe somewhat my bitter moan.'

Thus leaving apprehensions hideous,
 Down went the puss perfidious
 To where the sow, no longer digging,
 Was in the very act of pigging.

‘Good friend and neighbour,’ whispered she,
 ‘I warn you on your guard to be,
 Your pigs should you but leave a minute,
 This eagle here will seize them in it.

Speak not of this, I beg, at all,
 Lest on my head her wrath should fall.’

Another breast with fear inspired,
 With fiendish joy the cat retired.

The eagle ventured no egress
 To feed her young, the sow still less.

Fools they, to think that any curse
 Than ghastly famine could be worse !

Both stayed at home, resolved and obstinate,
 To save their young ones from impending fate, —
 The royal bird for fear of mine,
 For fear of royal claws the swine.

All died, at length, with hunger,
 The older and the younger ;

There stayed, of eagle race or boar,
 Not one this side of death’s dread door, —

A sad misfortune, which
 The wicked cats made rich.

Oh, what is there of hellish plot
 The treacherous tongue dares not !

Of all the ills Pandora's box¹⁸ outpoured,
Deceit, I think, is most to be abhorred.

VII.

THE DRUNKARD AND HIS WIFE.¹⁴

EACH has his fault, to which he clings
In spite of shame or fear.
This apophthegm a story brings,
To make its truth more clear.
A sot had lost health, mind, and purse ;
And, truly, for that matter,
Sots mostly lose the latter
Ere running half their course.

When wine, one day, of wit had filled the room,
His wife inclosed him in a spacious tomb.

There did the fumes evaporate
At leisure from his drowsy pate.

When he awoke, he found
His body wrapped around
With grave-clothes, chill and damp,
Beneath a dim sepulchral lamp.

'How 's this? My wife a widow sad?'
He cried, 'and I a ghost? Dead? dead?'
Thereat his spouse, with snaky hair,
And robes like those the Furies wear,

With voice to fit the realms below,
 Brought boiling caudle to his bier, —
 For Lucifer the proper cheer ;
 By which her husband came to know —
 For he had heard of those three ladies —
 Himself a citizen of Hades.

‘What may your office be?’

The phantom questioned he.

‘I’m server up of Pluto’s meat,

And bring his guests the same to eat.’

‘Well,’ says the sot, not taking time to think,

‘And don’t you bring us anything to drink?’

VIII.

THE GOUT AND THE SPIDER.¹⁵

WHEN Nature angrily turned out

Those plagues, the spider and the gout, —

‘See you,’ said she, ‘those huts so meanly built,
 These palaces so grand and richly gilt?’

By mutual agreement fix

Your choice of dwellings ; or if not,

To end th’ affair by lot,

Draw out these little sticks.’

‘The huts are not for me,’ the spider cried ;

‘And not for me the palace,’ cried the gout ;

For there a sort of men she spied

Called doctors, going in and out,

From whom she could not hope for ease.
 So hied her to the huts the fell disease,
 And, fastening on a poor man's toe,
 Hoped there to fatten on his woe,
 And torture him, fit after fit,
 Without a summons e'er to quit,
 From old Hippocrates.

The spider, on the lofty ceiling,
 As if she had a life-lease feeling,
 Wove wide her cunning toils,
 Soon rich with insect spoils.

A maid destroyed them as she swept the room :
 Repaired, again they felt the fatal broom.

The wretched creature, every day,
 From house and home must pack away.

At last, her courage giving out,
 She went to seek her sister gout,

And in the field descried her,
 Quite starved : more evils did betide her
 Than e'er befel the poorest spider, —
 Her toiling host enslaved her so,
 And made her chop and dig and hoe !

(Says one, 'Kept brisk and busy,
 The gout is made half easy.')

'Oh, when,' exclaimed the sad diseas
 'Will this my misery stop ?

Oh, sister spider, if you please,
 Our places let us swop.'

The spider gladly heard,
 And took hër at her word,
 And flourished in the cabin-lodge,
 Not forced the tidy broom to dodge.
 The gout, selecting her abode
 With an ecclesiastic judge,
 Turned judge herself, and, by her code,
 He from his couch no more could budge.
 The salves and cataplasms Heaven knows,
 That mocked the misery of his toes ;
 While aye, without a blush, the curse
 Kept driving onward worse and worse.
 Needless to say, the sisterhood
 Thought their exchange both wise and good.

IX.

THE WOLF AND THE STORK.¹⁸

THE wolves are prone to play the glutton.
 One, at a certain feast, 't is said,
 So stuffed himself with lamb and mutton,
 He seemed but little short of dead.
 Deep in his throat a bone stuck fast.
 Well for this wolf, who could not speak,
 That soon a stork quite near him passed.
 By signs invited, with her beak

The bone she drew
 With slight ado,
 And for this skilful surgery
 Demanded, modestly, her fee.
 'Your fee !' replied the wolf,
 In accents rather gruff ;
 'And is it not enough
 Your neck is safe from such a gulf?
 Go, for a wretch ingrate,
 Nor tempt again your fate !'

X.

THE LION BEATEN BY THE MAN.¹⁷

A PICTURE once was shown,
 In which one man, alone,
 Upon the ground had thrown
 A lion fully grown.
 Much gloried at the sight the rabble.
 A lion thus rebuked their babble :
 'That you have got the victory there,
 There is no contradiction.
 But, gentles, possibly you are
 The dupes of easy fiction :
 Had we the art of making pictures,
 Perhaps our champion had beat yours !'

XI.

THE FOX AND THE GRAPES.¹⁸

A FOX, almost with hunger dying,
 Some grapes upon a trellis spying,
 To all appearance ripe, clad in
 Their tempting russet skin,
 Most gladly would have eat them ;
 But since he could not get them,
 So far above his reach the vine, —
 ‘ They ’re sour,’ he said ; ‘ such grapes as these,
 The dogs may eat them if they please ! ’
 Did he not better than to whine ?

XII.

THE SWAN AND THE COOK.¹⁹

THE pleasures of a poultry yard
 Were by a swan and gosling shared.
 The swan was kept there for his looks.
 The thrifty gosling for the cooks :
 The first the garden’s pride, the latter
 A greater favourite on the platter.
 They swam the ditches, side by side.
 And oft in sports aquatic vied,

Plunging, splashing far and wide,
With rivalry ne'er satisfied.

One day the cook, named Thirsty John,
Sent for the gosling, took the swan,

In haste his throat to cut,
And put him in the pot.

The bird's complaint resounded
In glorious melody ;

Whereat the cook, astounded,
His sad mistake to see,

Cried, ' What ! make soup of a musician !
Please God, I 'll never set such dish on.

No, no ; I 'll never cut a throat
That sings so sweet a note.'

'T is thus, whatever peril may alarm us,
Sweet words will never harm us.

XIII.

THE WOLVES AND THE SHEEP.²⁰

By-GONE a thousand years of war,
The wearers of the fleece
And wolves at last made peace ;
Which both appeared the better for ;
For if the wolves had now and then
Eat up a straggling ewe or wether,
As often had the shepherd men
Turned wolf-skins into leather.

Fear always spoiled the verdant herbage,
And so it did the bloody carnage.

Hence peace was sweet ; and, lest it should be **riven**

On both sides hostages were given.

The sheep, as by the terms arranged,

For pups of wolves their dogs exchanged ;

Which being done above suspicion,

Confirmed and sealed by high commission,

What time the pups were fully grown,

And felt an appetite for prey,

And saw the sheepfold left alone,

The shepherds all away,

They seized the fattest lambs they could,

And, choking, dragged them to the wood ;

Of which, by secret means apprised,

Their sires, as is surmised,

Fell on the hostage guardians of the **sheep,**

And slew them all asleep.

So quick the deed of perfidy was done,

There fled to tell the tale not one !

From which we may conclude

That peace with villains will be **rued.**

Peace in itself, 't is true,

May be a good for you ;

But 't is an evil, nathless,

When enemies are **faithless.**

XIV.

THE LION GROWN OLD.²¹

A LION, mourning, in his age, the wane
 Of might once dreaded through his wild domain,
 Was mocked, at last, upon his throne,
 By subjects of his own,
 Strong through his weakness grown.
 The horse his head saluted with a kick ;
 The wolf snapped at his royal hide ;
 The ox, too, gored him in the side ;
 The unhappy lion, sad and sick,
 Could hardly growl, he was so weak.
 In uncomplaining, stoic pride,
 He waited for the hour of fate,
 Until the ass approached his gate ;
 Whereat, ' This is too much,' he saith ;
 ' I willingly would yield my breath ;
 But, ah, thy kick is double death !'

XV.

PHILOMEL AND PROGNE.²²

FROM home and city spires, one day,
 The swallow Progne flew away,
 And sought the bosky dell
 Where sang poor Philomel.²⁸

‘My sister,’ Progne said, ‘how do you do?
 ’T is now a thousand years since you
 Have been concealed from human view;
 I’m sure I have not seen your face
 Once since the times of Thrace.

Pray, will you never quit this dull retreat?’

‘Where could I find,’ said Philomel, ‘so sweet?’

‘What! sweet?’ cried Progne, — ‘sweet to waste
 Such tones on beasts devoid of taste,
 Or on some rustic, at the most!
 Should you by deserts be engrossed?
 Come, be the city’s pride and boast.
 Besides, the woods remind of harms
 That Tereus in them did your charms.’

‘Alas!’ replied the bird of song,

‘The thought of that so cruel wrong
 Makes me, from age to age,
 Prefer this hermitage;
 For nothing like the sight of men
 Can call up what I suffered then.’

XVI.

THE WOMAN DROWNED.²⁴

I HATE that saying, old and savage,
 ‘’T is nothing but a woman drowning.’
 That’s much, I say. What grief more keen **should**
 have edge
 Than loss of her, of all our joys the crowning?

Thus much suggests the fable I am borrowing.

A woman perished in the water,
 Where, anxiously, and sorrowing,
 Her husband sought her,
 To ease the grief he could not cure,
 By honoured rites of sepulture.
 It chanced that near the fatal spot,
 Along the stream which had
 Produced a death so sad,
 There walked some men that knew it not.
 The husband asked if they had seen
 His wife, or aught that hers had been.

One promptly answered, 'No!
 But search the stream below:
 It must have borne her in its flow.'
 'No,' said another; 'search above.

In that direction
 She would have floated, by the love
Of contradiction.'

This joke was truly out of season:
 I don't propose to weigh its reason.
 But whether such propensity
 The sex's fault may be,
 Or not, one thing is very sure,
 Its own propensities endure.
 Up to the end they'll have their will,
 And, if it could be, further still.

XVII.

THE WEASEL IN THE GRANARY.²⁵

A WEASEL through a hole contrived to squeeze
 (She was recovering from disease),
 Which led her to a farmer's hoard.
There lodged, her wasted form she cherished ;
 Heaven knows the lard and victuals stored
 That by her gnawing perished !
 Of which the consequence
 Was sudden corpulence.
 A week or so was past,
When, having fully broken fast,
 A noise she heard, and hurried
To find the hole by which she came,
And seemed to find it not the same ;
 So round she ran, most sadly flurried ;
And, coming back, thrust out her head,
Which, sticking there, she said,
 ' This is the hole, there can't be blunder :
 What makes it now so small, I wonder,
Where, but the other day, I passed with ease ?'
 A rat her trouble sees,
And cries, ' But with an emptier belly ;
 You entered lean, and lean must sally.'

What I have said to you
 Has eke been said to not a few,
 Who, in a vast variety of cases,²⁶
 Have ventured into such-like places.

XVIII.

THE CAT AND THE OLD RAT.²⁷

A STORY-WRITER of our sort
 Historifies, in short,
 Of one that may be reckoned
 A Rodilard the Second,²⁸ —
 The Alexander of the cats,
 The Attila,²⁹ the scourge of rats,
 Whose fierce and whiskered head
 Among the latter spread,
 A league around, its dread ;
 Who seemed, indeed, determined
 The world should be unvermined.

The planks with props more false than slim,
 The tempting heaps of poisoned meal,
 The traps of wire and traps of steel,
Were only play compared with him.
 At length, so sadly were they scared,
 The rats and mice no longer dared
 To show their thievish faces
 Outside their hiding-places,

Thus shunning all pursuit ; whereat
Our crafty General Cat
Contrived to hang himself, as dead,
Beside the wall with downward head,
Resisting gravitation's laws
By clinging with his hinder claws
 To some small bit of string.
 The rats esteemed the thing
A judgment for some naughty deed,
 Some thievish snatch
 Or ugly scratch ;
And thought their foe had got his meed
 By being hung indeed.
 With hope elated all
 Of laughing at his funeral,
They thrust their noses out in air ,
And now to show their heads they dare ;
Now dodging back, now venturing more ;
 At last upon the larder's store
 They fall to filching, as of yore.
A scanty feast enjoyed these shallows ;
Down dropped the hung one from his gallows,
 And of the hindmost caught.
 ' Some other tricks to me are known,'
Said he, while tearing bone from bone,
 ' By long experience taught ;
The point is settled, free from doubt,
That from your holes you shall come out.'

His threat as good as prophecy
Was proved by Mr. Mildandsly ;
For, putting on a mealy robe,
He squatted in an open tub,
And held his purring and his breath :
Out came the vermin to their death.
On this occasion, one old stager,
A rat as grey as any badger,
Who had in battle lost his tail,
Abstained from smelling at the meal ;
And cried, far off, ' Ah, General Cat,
I much suspect a heap like that ;
Your meal is not the thing, perhaps,
For one who knows somewhat of traps ;
Should you a sack of meal become,
I 'd let you be, and stay at home.'

Well said, I think, and prudently,
By one who knew distrust to be
The parent of security.





BOOK IV.

I.

THE LION IN LOVE.¹

TO MADemoisELLE DE SéVIGNÉ.²

SÉVIGNÉ, type of every grace
In female form and face,
In your regardlessness of men,
Can you show favour when
The sportive fable craves your ear,
And see, unmoved by fear,
A lion's haughty heart
Thrust through by Love's audacious dart?
Strange conqueror, Love! And happy he,
And strangely privileged and free,
Who only knows by story
Him and his feats of glory!
If on this subject you are wont
To think the simple truth too blunt,
The fabulous may less affront;

Which now, inspired with gratitude,
Yea, kindled into zeal most fervent,
Doth venture to intrude
Within your maiden solitude,
And kneel, your humble servant. —
In times when animals were speakers,
Among the quadrupedal seekers
Of our alliance
There came the lions.
And wherefore not? for then
They yielded not to men
In point of courage or of sense,
Nor were in looks without pretence.
A high-born lion, on his way
Across a meadow, met one day
A shepherdess, who charmed him so,
That, as such matters ought to go,
He sought the maiden for his bride.
Her sire, it cannot be denied,
Had much preferred a son-in-law
Of less terrific mouth and paw.
It was not easy to decide —
The lion might the gift abuse —
'T was not quite prudent to refuse.
And if refusal there should be,
Perhaps a marriage one would see,
Some morning, made clandestinely.
For, over and above
The fact that she could bear

With none but males of martial air,
The lady was in love
With him of shaggy hair.
Her sire, much wanting cover
To send away the lover,
Thus spoke : ' My daughter, sir,
Is delicate. I fear to her
Your fond caressings
Will prove rough blessings.
To banish all alarm
About such sort of harm,
Permit us to remove the cause,
By filing off your teeth and claws.
In such a case, your royal kiss
Will be to her a safer bliss,
And to yourself a sweeter ;
Since she will more respond
To those endearments fond
With which you greet her.'
The lion gave consent at once,
By love so great a dunce !
Without a tooth or claw now view him, —
A fort with cannon spiked.
The dogs, let loose upon him, slew him,
All biting safely where they liked.

O tyrant Love ! when held by you,
We may to prudence bid adieu.

II.

THE SHEPHERD AND THE SEA.⁸

A SHEPHERD, neighbour to the sea,
Lived with his flock contentedly.

His fortune, though but small,
Was safe within his call.

At last some stranded kegs of gold
Him tempted, and his flock he sold,
Turned merchant, and the ocean's waves
Bore all his treasure — to its caves.
Brought back to keeping sheep once more,
But not chief shepherd, as before,
When sheep were his that grazed the shore,
He who, as Corydon or Thyrsis,
Might once have shone in pastoral verses,
Bedecked with rhyme and metre,
Was nothing now but Peter.

But time and toil redeemed in full
Those harmless creatures rich in wool;
And as the lulling winds, one day,

The vessels wafted with a gentle motion,
'Want you,' he cried, 'more money, Madam Ocean?
Address yourself to some one else, I pray;
You shall not get it out of me!
I know too well your treachery.'

This tale 's no fiction, but a fact,
Which, by experience backed,
Proves that a single penny,
At present held, and certain,
Is worth five times as many,
Of Hope's, beyond the curtain ;
That one should be content with his condition,
And shut his ears to counsels of ambition,
More faithless than the wreck-strown sea, and which
Doth thousands beggar where it makes one rich, —
Inspires the hope of wealth, in glorious forms,
And blasts the same with piracy and storms.

III.

THE FLY AND THE ANT.⁴

A FLY and ant, upon a sunny bank,
Discussed the question of their rank.
'O Jupiter!' the former said,
'Can love of self so turn the head,
That one so mean and crawling,
And of so low a calling,
To boast equality shall dare
With me, the daughter of the air?
In palaces I am a guest,
And even at thy glorious feast.

Whene'er the people that adore thee
 May immolate for thee a bullock,
I'm sure to taste the meat before thee.
 Meanwhile this starveling, in her hillock,
Is living on some bit of straw
Which she has laboured home to draw.
But tell me now, my little thing,
Do you camp ever on a king,
An emperor, or lady?
I do, and have full many a play-day
On fairest bosom of the fair,
And sport myself upon her hair.
Come now, my hearty, rack your brain
To make a case about your grain.'
'Well, have you done?' replied the ant.
'You enter palaces, I grant,
And for it get right soundly cursed.
 Of sacrifices, rich and fat,
Your taste, quite likely, is the first :
 Are they the better off for that?
You enter with the holy train :
So enters many a wretch profane.
On heads of kings and asses you may squat :
Deny your vaunting I will not :
But well such impudence, I know,
Provokes a sometimes fatal blow.
The name in which your vanity delights
Is owned as well by parasites,

And spies that die by ropes, — as you soon will
 By famine or by ague-chill,
 When Phœbus goes to cheer
 The other hemisphere, —
 The very time to me most dear.
 Not forced abroad to go
 Through wind and rain and snow,
 My summer's work I then enjoy,
 And happily my mind employ,
 From care by care exempted.
 By which this truth I leave to you,
 That by two sorts of glory we are tempted, —
 The false one and the true.
 Work waits, time flies ; adieu :
 This gabble does not fill
 My granary or till.'

IV.

THE GARDENER AND HIS LORD.

A LOVER of gardens, half cit and half clown,
 Possessed a nice garden beside a small town ;
 And with it a field by a live hedge inclosed,
 Where sorrel and lettuce, at random disposed,
 A little of jasmine, and much of wild thyme,
 Grew gaily, and all in their prime

To make up Miss Peggy's bouquet,
 The grace of her bright wedding-day.
 For poaching in such a nice field, — 't was a shame ;
 A foraging, cud-chewing hare was to blame.

Whereof the good owner bore down

This tale to the lord of the town :

' Some mischievous animal, morning and night,
 In spite of my caution, comes in for his bite.
 He laughs at my cunning-set dead-falls and snares ;
 For clubbing and stoning as little he cares.
 I think him a wizard. A wizard ! the coot !
 I 'd catch him if he were a devil to boot !'
 The lord said, in haste to have sport for his hounds,
 ' I 'll clear him, I warrant you, out of your grounds ;
 To-morrow I 'll do it without any fail.'

The thing thus agreed on, all hearty and hale,
 The lord and his party, at crack of the dawn,
 With hounds at their heels cantered over the lawn.
 Arrived, said the lord in his jovial mood,
 ' We 'll breakfast with you, if your chickens are
 good.

That lass, my good man, I suppose is your daughter :
 No news of a son-in-law ? Any one sought her ?
 No doubt, by the score. Keep an eye on the docket,
 Eh ? Dost understand me ? I speak of the pocket.'
 So saying, the daughter he graciously greeted,
 And close by his lordship he bade her be seated ;

Avowed himself pleased with so handsome a maid,
And then with her kerchief familiarly played.
Impertinent freedoms the virtuous fair
Repelled with a modest and lady-like air, —
So much that her father a little suspected
The girl had already a lover elected.
Meanwhile in the kitchen what bustling and cooking !
'For what are your hams? They are very good
looking.'
'They 're kept for your lordship.' 'I take them,'
said he ;
'Such elegant fitches are welcome to me.'
He breakfasted finely his troop, with delight, —
Dogs, horses, and grooms of the best appetite.
Thus he governed his host in the shape of a guest,
Unbottled his wine, and his daughter caressed.
To breakfast, the huddle of hunters succeeds,
The yelping of dogs and the neighing of steeds,
All cheering and fixing for wonderful deeds ;
The horns and the bugles make thundering din :
Much wonders our gardener what it can mean.
The worst is, his garden most woefully fares :
Adieu to its arbours and borders and squares ;
Adieu to its chiccory, onions, and leeks ;
Adieu to whatever good cookery seeks !

Beneath a great cabbage the hare was in bed,
Was started, and shot at, and hastily fled.

Off went the wild chase, with a terrible screech,
And not through a hole, but a horrible breach,
Which some one had made, at the beck of the lord,
Wide through the poor hedge. 'T would have been
quite absurd

Should lordship not freely from garden go out,
On horseback, attended by rabble and rout.
Scarce suffered the gardener his patience to wince,
Consoling himself, — 'T was the sport of a prince ;
While bipeds and quadrupeds served to devour,
And trample and waste, in the space of an hour,
Far more than a nation of foraging hares
Could possibly do in a hundred of years.

Small princes, this story is true,
When told in relation to you.

In settling your quarrels with kings for your tools,
You prove yourselves losers and eminent fools.

V.

THE ASS AND THE LITTLE DOG.⁶

ONE'S native talent from its course
Cannot be turned aside by force ;
But poorly apes the country clown
The polished manners of the town.

Their Maker chooses but a few
With power of pleasing to imbue ;
Where wisely leave it we, the mass,
Unlike a certain fabled ass
That thought to gain his master's blessing
By jumping on him and caressing.

‘What !’ said the donkey in his heart,
‘Ought it to be that puppy's part
To lead his useless life

In full companionship
With master and his wife,

While I must bear the whip ?
What doth the cur a kiss to draw ?
Forsooth, he only gives his paw !
If that is all there needs to please,
I'll do the thing myself, with ease.’

Possessed with this bright notion, —
His master sitting on his chair,
At leisure in the open air, —

He ambled up, with awkward motion,
And put his talents to the proof ;
Upraised his bruised and battered hoof,
And, with an amiable mien,
His master patted on the chin,
The action gracing with a word, —
The fondest bray that e'er was heard !
Oh, such caressing was there ever ?
Or melody with such a quaver ?

‘Ho ! Martin !⁶ here ! a club, a club bring !’
Out cried the master, sore offended.
So Martin gave the ass a drubbing, —
And so the comedy was ended.

VI.

THE BATTLE OF THE RATS AND THE
WEASELS.⁷

THE weasels live, no more than cats,
On terms of friendship with the rats ;
And, were it not that these
Through doors contrive to squeeze,
Too narrow for their foes,
The animals long-snouted
Would long ago have routed,
And from the planet scouted
Their race, as I suppose.

One year it did betide,
When they were multiplied,
An army took the field
Of rats, with spear and shield,
Whose crowded ranks led on
A king named Ratapon.
The weasels, too, their banner
Unfurled in warlike manner.

As Fame her trumpet sounds,
The victory balanced well ;
Enriched were fallow grounds
Where slaughtered legions fell ;
But by said trollop's tattle,
The loss of life in battle
Thinned most the rattish race
In almost every place ;
And finally their rout
Was total, spite of stout
Artarpax and Psicarpax,
And valiant Meridarpax,⁸
Who, covered o'er with dust,
Long time sustained their host
Down sinking on the plain.
Their efforts were in vain ;
Fate ruled that final hour
(Inexorable power !),
And so the captains fled
As well as those they led ;
The princes perished all.
The undistinguished small
In certain holes found shelter,
In crowding, helter-skelter ;
But the nobility
Could not go in so free,
Who proudly had assumed
Each one a helmet plumed ;

We know not, truly, whether,
For honour's sake the feather,
Or foes to strike with terror ;
But, truly, 't was their error.
Nor hole, nor crack, nor crevice
 Will let their head-gear in ;
While meaner rats in bebies
 An easy passage win ;
So that the shafts of fate
Do chiefly hit the great.

A feather in the cap
Is oft a great mishap.
An equipage too grand,
Comes often to a stand
Within a narrow place.
The small, whate'er the case,
With ease slip through a strait,
Where larger folks must wait.

VII.

THE MONKEY AND THE DOLPHIN.

It was the custom of the Greeks
For passengers o'er sea to carry
 Both monkeys full of tricks,
And funny dogs, to make them merry.

A ship, that had such things on deck,
Not far from Athens, went to wreck.
But for the dolphins, all had drowned.

They are a philanthropic fish,
Which fact in Pliny may be found :

A better voucher who could wish?
They did their best on this occasion.

A monkey even, on their plan,
Well nigh attained his own salvation :

A dolphin took him for a man,
And on his dorsal gave him place.
So grave the silly creature's face,
That one might well have set him down
That old musician of renown.¹⁰

The fish had almost reached the land,

When, as it happened, — what a pity ! —
He asked, ' Are you from Athens grand ?'

' Yes ; well they know me in that city.
If ever you have business there,

I 'll help you do it, for my kin
The highest offices are in.

My cousin, sir, is now lord mayor.'

The dolphin thanked him, with good grace,
Both for himself and all his race,

And asked, ' You doubtless know Piræus,
Where, should we come to town, you 'll see us.'

' Piræus? yes, indeed I know ;
He was my crony long ago.'

The dunce knew not the harbour's name,
And for a man's mistook the same.

The people are by no means few,
Who never went ten miles from home,
Nor know their market-town from Rome,

Yet cackle just as if they knew.
The dolphin laughed, and then began
His rider's form and face to scan,
And found himself about to save
From fishy feasts, beneath the wave,
A mere resemblance of a man.
So, plunging down, he turned to find
Some drowning wight of human kind.

VIII.

THE MAN AND THE WOODEN GOD.¹¹

A PAGAN kept a god of wood, —
A sort that never hears,
Though furnished well with ears, —
From which he hoped for wondrous good.
The idol cost the board of three ;
So much enriched was he
With vows and offerings vain,
With bullocks garlanded and slain :

No idol ever had, as that,
A kitchen quite so full and fat.
But all this worship at his shrine
Brought not from this same block divine
Inheritance, or hidden mine,
Or luck at play, or any favour.
Nay, more, if any storm whatever
Brewed trouble here or there,
The man was sure to have his share,
And suffer in his purse,
Although the god fared none the worse.
At last, by sheer impatience bold,
The man a crowbar seizes,
His idol breaks in pieces,
And finds it richly stuffed with gold.
'How's this? Have I devoutly treated,'
Says he, 'your godship, to be cheated?
Now leave my house, and go your way,
And search for altars where you may.
You're like those natures, dull and gross,
From which comes nothing but by blows;
The more I gave, the less I got;
I'll now be rich, and you may rot.'

IX.

THE JAY IN THE FEATHERS OF THE
PEACOCK.¹²

A PEACOCK moulted ; soon a jay was seen
 Bedecked with Argus tail of gold and green,¹⁸
 High strutting, with elated crest,
 As much a peacock as the rest.

His trick was recognized and bruited,
 His person jeered at, hissed, and hooted.
 The peacock gentry flocked together,
 And plucked the fool of every feather.

Nay, more, when back he sneaked to join his race,
 They snut their portals in his face.

There is another sort of jay,
 The number of its legs the same,
 Which makes of borrowed plumes display,
 And plagiarism is its name.

But hush ! the tribe I 'll not offend :
 'Tis not my work their ways to mend.

X.

THE CAMEL AND THE FLOATING
STICKS.¹⁴

THE first who saw the humpbacked camel
Fled off for life ; the next approached with **care** ;
The third with tyrant rope did boldly **dare**
The desert wanderer to trammel.

Such is the power of use to change
The face of objects new and strange ;
Which grow, by looking at, so tame,
They do not even seem the same.

And since this theme is up for our attention,
A certain watchman I will mention,
Who, seeing something far
Away upon the ocean,
Could not but speak his **notion**
That 't was a ship of war.

Some minutes more had past, —
A bomb-ketch 't was, without a **sail**,
And then a boat, and then a bale,
And floating sticks of wood at last !

Full many things on earth, I wot,
Will claim this tale, — and well they **may** ;
They 're something dreadful far away,
But near at hand — they 're not.

XI.

THE FROG AND THE RAT.¹⁵

THEY to ~~bamboozle~~ are inclined,
 Saith Merlin,¹⁶ who bamboozled are.
 The word, though rather unrefined,
 Has yet an energy we ill can spare ;
 So by its aid I introduce my tale.
 A well-fed ~~rat,~~ rotund and hale,
 Not knowing either Fast or Lent,
Disporting round a frog-pond went.
 A frog approached, and, with a friendly greeting,
 Invited him to see her at her home,
 And pledged a dinner worth his eating, —
To which the rat was nothing loath to come.
 Of words persuasive there was little need :
 She spoke, however, of a grateful bath ;
 Of sports and curious wonders on their path ;
 Of rarities of flower and rush and reed :
 One day he would recount with glee
 To his assembled progeny
 The various beauties of these places,
 The customs of the various races,
 And laws that sway the realms aquatic
 (She did not mean the hydrostatic!).

One thing alone the rat perplexed, —
He was but moderate as a swimmer.
The frog this matter nicely fixed
By kindly lending him her
Long paw, which with a rush she tied
To his ; and off they started, side by side.
Arrived upon the lakelet's brink,
There was but little time to think.

The frog leaped in, and almost brought her
Bound guest to land beneath the water.

Perfidious breach of law and right !
She meant to have a supper warm
Out of his sleek and dainty form.

Already did her appetite
Dwell on the morsel with delight.
The gods, in anguish, he invokes ;
His faithless hostess rudely mocks ;
He struggles up, she struggles down.

A kite, that hovers in the air,
Inspecting everything with care,
Now spies the rat belike to drown,
And, with a rapid wing,
Upbears the wretched thing,
The frog, too, dangling by the string !
The joy of such a double haul
Was to the hungry kite not small.
It gave him all that he could wish, —
A double meal, of flesh and fish.

The best-contrived deceit
 Can hurt its own contriver,
 And perfidy doth often cheat
 Its author's purse of every stiver.

XII.

THE ANIMALS SENDING TRIBUTE TO
 ALEXANDER.¹⁷

A FABLE flourished with antiquity
 Whose meaning I could never clearly see.
 Kind reader, draw the moral if you 're able ;
 I give you here the naked fable.
 Fame having bruited that a great commander,
 A son of Jove, a certain Alexander,
 Resolved to leave nought free on this our ball,
 Had to his footstool gravely summoned all
 Men, quadrupeds, and nullipeds, together
 With all the bird-republics, every feather, —
 The goddess of the hundred mouths, I say,
 Thus having spread dismay,
 By widely publishing abroad
 This mandate of the demigod,
 'The animals, and all that do obey
 Their appetite alone, mistrusted now
 That to another sceptre they must bow.
 Far in the desert met their various races,
 All gathering from their hiding-places.

Discussed was many a notion.

At last it was resolved, on motion,
To pacify the conquering banner,

By sending homage in, and tribute.

With both the homage and its manner

They charged the monkey, as a glib brute ;

And, lest the chap should too much chatter,

In black on white they wrote the matter.

Nought but the tribute served to fash,

As that must needs be paid in cash.

A prince, who chanced a mine to own,

At last, obliged them with a loan.

The mule and ass, to bear the treasure,

Their service tendered, full of pleasure ;

And then the caravan was none the worse,

Assisted by the camel and the horse.

Forthwith proceeded all the four

Behind the new ambassador,

And saw, ere long, within a narrow place,

Monseigneur Lion's quite unwelcome face.

' Well met, and all in time,' said he ;

' Myself your fellow traveller will be.

I wend my tribute by itself to bear ;

And though 't is light, I well might spare

The unaccustomed load.

Take each a quarter, if you please,

And I will guard you on the road ;

More free and at my ease, —

In better plight, you understand,
To fight with any robber band.'

A lion to refuse, the fact is,
Is not a very usual practice :

So in he comes, for better and for worse ;

Whatever he demands is done,

And, spite of Jove's heroic son,

He fattens freely from the public purse.

While wending on their way,

They found a spot one day,

With waters hemmed, of crystal sheen ;

Its carpet, flower-besprinkled green ;

Where pastured at their ease

Both flocks of sheep and dainty heifers,

And played the cooling breeze, —

The native land of all the zephyrs.

No sooner is the lion there

Than of some sickness he complains.

Says he, ' You on your mission fare.

A fever, with its thirst and pains,

Dries up my blood, and bakes my brains ;

And I must search some herb,

Its fatal power to curb.

For you, there is no time to waste ;

Pay me my money, and make haste.'

The treasures were unbound,

And placed upon the ground.

Then, with a look which testified

His royal joy, the lion cried,

‘My coins, good heavens, have multiplied !
And see the young ones of the gold
As big already as the old !

The increase belongs to me, no doubt ;’

And eagerly he took it out !

’T was little stayed beneath the lid ;

The wonder was that any did.

Confounded were the monkey and his suite.

And, dumb with fear, betook them to their way,

And bore complaint to Jove’s great son, they say—

Complaint without a reason meet ;

For what could he? Though a celestial scion,

He could but fight, as lion versus lion.

When corsairs battle, Turk with Turk,

They ’re not about their proper work.

XIII.

THE HORSE WISHING TO BE REVENGED UPON THE STAG.¹⁸

THE horses have not always been

The humble slaves of men.

When, in the far-off past,

The fare of gentlemen was mast,

And even hats were never felt,

Horse, ass, and mule in forests dwelt.

Nor saw one then, as in these ages,
So many saddles, housings, pillions ;
Such splendid equipages,
With golden-lace postilions ;
Such harnesses for cattle,
To be consumed in battle ;
As one saw not so many feasts,
And people married by the priests.
The horse fell out, within that space,
With the antlered stag, so fleetly made :
He could not catch him in a race,
And so he came to man for aid.
Man first his suppliant bitted ;
Then, on his back well seated,
Gave chase with spear, and rested not
Till to the ground the foe he brought.
This done, the honest horse, quite blindly,
Thus thanked his benefactor kindly :
‘ Dear sir, I ’m much obliged to you ;
I ’ll back to savage life. Adieu ! ’
‘ Oh, no, ’ the man replied ;
‘ You ’d better here abide ;
I know too well your use.
Here, free from all abuse,
Remain a liege to me,
And large your provender shall be.’
Alas ! good housing or good cheer,
That costs one’s liberty, is dear.

The horse his folly now perceived,
But quite too late he grieved.

No grief his fate could alter ;
His stall was built, and there he lived,
And died there in his halter.

Ah ! wise had he one small offence forgot !
Revenge, however sweet, is dearly bought
By that one good, which gone, all else is nought.

XIV.

THE FOX AND THE BUST.¹⁹

THE great are like the maskers of the stage :
Their show deceives the simple of the age.
For all that they appear to be they pass,
With only those whose type 's the ass.

The fox, more wary, looks beneath the skin,
And looks on every side, and, when he sees
That all their glory is a semblance thin,
He turns, and saves the hinges of his knees,
With such a speech as once, 't is said,
He uttered to a hero's head.

A bust, somewhat colossal in its size,
Attracted crowds of wondering eyes.
The fox admired the sculptor's pains :
' Fine head,' said he, ' but void of brains !'
The same remark to many a lord applies.

XV.

THE WOLF, THE GOAT, AND THE KID.²⁰

As went the goat her pendent dugs to fill,

And browse the herbage of a distant hill,

She latched her door, and bid,

With matron care, her kid :

‘ My daughter, as you live,

 This portal don’t undo

 To any creature who

 This watchword does not give :

“ Deuce take the wolf and all his race ! ” ’

The wolf was passing near the place

By chance, and heard the words with pleasure,

 And laid them up as useful treasure ;

And hardly need we mention,

Escaped the goat’s attention.

 No sooner did he see

 The matron off, than he.

With hypocritic tone and face,

Cried out before the place,

‘ Deuce take the wolf and all his race ! ’

 Not doubting thus to gain admission.

The kid, not void of all suspicion,

Peered through a crack, and cried,

 ‘ Show me white paw before

 You ask me to undo the door.’

The wolf could not, if he had died,
 For wolves have no connexion
 With paws of that complexion.
 So, much surprised, our gormandiser
 Retired to fast till he was wiser.
 How would the kid have been undone
 Had she but trusted to the word
 The wolf by chance had overheard !
 Two sureties better are than one ;
 And caution 's worth its cost,
 Though sometimes seeming lost.

XVI.

**THE WOLF, THE MOTHER, AND HER
 CHILD.²¹**

THIS wolf another brings to mind,
 Who found Dame Fortune more unkind,
 In that the greedy, pirate sinner,
 Was balked of life as well as dinner.
 As saith our tale, a villager
 Dwelt in a by, unguarded place ;
 There, hungry, watched our pillager
 For luck and chance to mend his case.
 For there his thievish eyes had seen
 All sorts of game go out and in, —

Nice sucking calves ; and lambs and sheep ;
And turkeys by the regiment,
With steps so proud, and necks so bent,
They 'd make a daintier glutton weep.
The thief at length began to tire
Of being gnawed by vain desire.
Just then a child set up a cry :
'Be still,' the mother said, 'or I
Will throw you to the wolf, you brat !'
'Ha, ha !' thought he, 'what talk is that !'
The gods be thanked for luck so good !'
And ready at the door he stood,
When soothingly the mother said,
'Now cry no more, my little dear ;
That naughty wolf, if he comes here,
Your dear papa shall kill him dead.'
'Humph !' cried the veteran mutton-eater.
'Now this, now that ! Now hot, now cool !
Is this the way they change their metre ?
And do they take me for a fool ?
Some day, a nutting in the wood,
That young one yet shall be my food.'
But little time has he to dote
On such a feast ; the dogs rush out
And seize the caitiff by the throat ;
And country ditchers, thick and stout,
With rustic spears and forks of iron,
The hapless animal environ.

‘What brought you here, old head?’ cried one.
 He told it all, as I have done.
 ‘Why, bless my soul!’ the frantic mother said, —
 ‘You, villain, eat my little son!
 And did I nurse the darling boy,
 Your fiendish appetite to cloy?’
 With that they knocked him on the head.
 His feet and scalp they bore to town,
 To grace the seigneur’s hall,
 Where, pinned against the wall,
 This verse completed his renown:
 ‘Ye honest wolves, believe not all
 That mothers say, when children squall!’

XVII.

THE WORDS OF SOCRATES.²³

A HOUSE was built by Socrates
 That failed the public taste to please.
 Some blamed the inside; some, the out; and all
 Agreed that the apartments were too small.
 Such rooms for him, the greatest sage of Greece!
 ‘I ask,’ said he, ‘no greater bliss
 Than real friends to fill e’en this.’
 And reason had good Socrates
 To think his house too large for these.

A crowd to be your friends will claim,
 Till some unhandsome test you bring.
 There 's nothing plentier than the name ;
 There 's nothing rarer than the thing.

XVIII.

THE OLD MAN AND HIS SONS.²⁸

ALL power is feeble with dissension :
 For this I quote the Phrygian slave.²⁴
 If aught I add to his invention,
 It is our manners to engrave,
 And not from any envious wishes, —
 I 'm not so foolishly ambitious.
 Phædrus enriches oft his story,
 In quest — I doubt it not — of glory :
 Such thoughts were idle in my breast.

An aged man, near going to his rest,
 His gathered sons thus solemnly addressed :
 'To break this bunch of arrows you may try ;
 And, first, the string that binds them I untie.'
 The eldest, having tried with might and main,
 Exclaimed, 'This bundle I resign
 To muscles sturdier than mine.'
 The second tried, and bowed himself in vain.
 The youngest took them with the like success.
 All were obliged their weakness to confess.

Unharm'd the arrows pass'd from son to son ;
 Of all they did not break a single one.
 'Weak fellows !' said their sire, ' I now must show
 What in the case my feeble strength can do.'
 They laugh'd, and thought their father but in
 joke,
 Till, one by one, they saw the arrows broke.
 'See concord's power !' replied the sire ; ' as long
 As you in love agree, you will be strong.
 I go, my sons, to join our fathers good.
 Now promise me to live as brothers should,
 And soothe by this your dying father's fears.'
 Each strictly promis'd, with a flood of tears.
 Their father took them by the hand, and died ;
 And soon the virtue of their vows was tried.
 Their sire had left a large estate
 Involved in lawsuits intricate ;
 Here seized a creditor, and there
 A neighbour levied for a share.
 At first the trio nobly bore
 The brunt of all this legal war.
 But short their friendship as 't was rare
 Whom blood had join'd — and small the wonder ! —
 The force of interest drove asunder ;
 And, as is wont in such affairs,
 Ambition, envy, were co-heirs.
 In parcelling their sire's estate,
 They quarrel, quibble, litigate,

Each aiming to supplant the other.
 The judge, by turns, condemns each brother.
 Their creditors make new assault,
 Some pleading error, some default.
 The sundered brothers disagree ;
 For counsel one, have counsels three.
 All lose their wealth ; and now their sorrows
 Bring fresh to mind those broken arrows.

XIX.

THE ORACLE AND THE ATHEIST.²⁶

THAT man his Maker can deceive,
 Is monstrous folly to believe.
 The labyrinthine mazes of the heart
 Are open to His eyes in every part.
 Whatever one may do, or think, or feel,
 From Him no darkness can the thing conceal.
 A pagan once, of graceless heart and hollow,
 Whose faith in gods, I 'm apprehensive,
 Was quite as real as expensive,
 Consulted, at his shrine, the god Apollo.
 'Is what I hold alive, or not ?'
 Said he, — a sparrow having brought,
 Prepared to wring its neck, or let it fly,
 As need might be, to give the god the lie.

Apollo saw the trick,
 And answered quick,
 'Dead or alive, show me your sparrow,
 And cease to set for me a trap
 Which can but cause yourself mishap.
 I see afar, and far I shoot my arrow.'

XX.

THE MISER WHO HAD LOST HIS
TREASURE.²⁶

Tis use that constitutes possession.
 I ask that sort of men, whose passion
 It is to get and never spend,
 Of all their toil what is the end?
 What they enjoy of all their labours
 Which do not equally their neighbours?
 Throughout this upper mortal strife,
 The miser leads a beggar's life.
 Old Æsop's man of hidden treasure
 May serve the case to demonstrate.
 He had a great estate,
 But chose a second life to wait
 Ere he began to taste his pleasure.
 This man, whom gold so little blessed,
Was not possessor, but possessed.

His cash he buried under ground,
Where only might his heart be found ;
It being, then, his sole delight
To ponder of it day and night,
And consecrate his rusty pelf,
A sacred offering, to himself.

In all his eating, drinking, travel,
Most wondrous short of funds he seemed ;
One would have thought he little dreamed
Where lay such sums beneath the gravel.
A ditcher marked his coming to the spot,
So frequent was it,
And thus at last some little inkling got
Of the deposit.

He took it all, and babbled not.

One morning, ere the dawn,
Forth had our miser gone
To worship what he loved the best,
When, lo ! he found an empty nest !
Alas ! what groaning, wailing, crying !
What deep and bitter sighing !

His torment makes him tear
Out by the roots his hair.

A passenger demandeth why
Such marvellous outcry.

‘They’ve got my gold ! it’s gone, it’s gone !’

‘Your gold ! pray where ?’ — ‘Beneath this
stone.’

‘Why, man, is this a time of war,
That you should bring your gold so far?
You’d better keep it in your drawer,
And I’ll be bound, if once but in it,
You could have got it any minute.’
‘At any minute! Ah, Heaven knows
That cash comes harder than it goes!
I touched it not.’ ‘Then have the grace
To explain to me that rueful face,’
Replied the man; ‘for, if ’t is true
You touched it not, how plain the case,
That, put the stone back in its place,
And all will be as well for you!’

XXI.

THE EYE OF THE MASTER.²⁷

A STAG took refuge from the chase
Among the oxen of a stable,
Who counselled him, as saith the fable,
To seek at once some safer place.
‘My brothers,’ said the fugitive,
‘Betray me not, and, as I live,
The richest pasture I will show,
That e’er was grazed on, high or low;
Your kindness you will not regret,
For well some day I’ll pay the debt.’

The oxen promised secrecy.

Down crouched the stag, and breathed **more free.**

At eventide they brought fresh hay,
As was their custom day by day ;
And often came the servants near,
As did indeed the overseer,
But with so little thought or care,
That neither horns, nor hide, nor hair
Revealed to them the stag was there.

Already thanked the wild-wood stranger

The oxen for their treatment kind,
And there to wait made up his mind,

Till he might issue free from danger.

Replied an ox that chewed the cud,

‘Your case looks fairly in the bud ;

But then I fear the reason why

Is, that the man of sharpest eye

Hath not yet come his look to take.

I dread his coming, for your sake ;

Your boasting may be premature :

Till then, poor stag, you ’re not secure.’

’T was but a little while before

The careful master oped the door.

‘How ’s this, my boys?’ said he ;

‘These empty racks will never do.

Go, change this dirty litter too.

More care than this I want to see

Of oxen that belong to me.

Well, Jim, my boy, you 're young and stout :
 What would it cost to clear these cobwebs out ?
 And put these yokes and hames and traces,
 All as they should be, in their places ?'

Thus looking round, he came to see
 One head he did not usually.

The stag is found ; his foes
 Deal heavily their blows.

Down sinks he in the strife ;
 No tears can save his life.

They slay, and dress, and salt the beast,
 And cook his flesh in many a feast,
 And many a neighbour gets a taste.

As Phædrus says it, pithily,
 The master's is the eye to see :
 I add the lover's, as for me.

XXII.

THE LARK AND HER YOUNG ONES WITH THE OWNER OF A FIELD.²⁸

'DEPEND upon yourself alone,'
 Has to a common proverb grown.
 'T is thus confirmed in Æsop's way :
 The larks to build their nests are seen
 Among the wheat-crops young and green ;
 That is to say,

What time all things, Dame Nature heeding,
Betake themselves to love and breeding, —

The monstrous whales and sharks

Beneath the briny flood;

The tigers in the wood,

And in the fields, the larks.

One she, however, of these last,

Found more than half the spring-time past

Without the taste of spring-time pleasures ;

When firmly she set up her will

That she would be a mother still,

And resolutely took her measures :

First, got herself by Hymen matched ;

Then built her nest, laid, sat, and hatched.

All went as well as such things could.

The wheat-crop ripening ere the brood

Were strong enough to take their flight,

Aware how perilous their plight,

The lark went out to search for food,

And told her young to listen well,

And keep a constant sentinel.

The owner of this field,' said she,

'Will come, I know, his grain to see.

Hear all he says ; we little birds

Must shape our conduct by his words.'

No sooner was the lark away,

Than came the owner with his son.

'This wheat is ripe,' said he ; 'now run

And give our friends a call
 To bring their sickles all,
 And help us, great and small,
 To-morrow, at the break of day.'

The lark, returning, found no harm,
 Except her nest in wild alarm.
 Says one, 'We heard the owner say,
 Go, give our friends a call
 To help, to-morrow, break of day.'

Replied the lark, 'If that is all,
 We need not be in any fear,
 But only keep an open ear.
 As gay as larks, now eat your victuals.'
 They ate and slept, the great and littles.
 The dawn arrives, but not the friends ;
 The lark soars up, the owner wends
 His usual round to view his land.
 'This grain,' says he, 'ought not to stand.
 Our friends do wrong ; and so does he
 Who trusts that friends will friendly be.
 My son, go call our kith and kin
 To help us get our harvest in.'

This second order made
 The little larks still more afraid.
 'He sent for kindred, mother, by his son ;
 The work will now indeed be done.'

'No, darlings ; go to sleep :
 Our lowly nest we 'll keep.'

With reason said ; for kindred there came none.
Thus. tired of expectation vain,
Once more the owner viewed his grain.
' My son,' said he, ' we 're surely fools
To wait for other people's tools ;
As if one might, for love or pelf,
Have friends more faithful than himself !
Engrave this lesson deep, my son.
And know you now what must be done ?
We must ourselves our sickles bring,
And, while the larks their matins sing,
Begin the work ; and, on this plan,
Get in our harvest as we can.'
This plan the lark no sooner knew,
Than, ' Now 's the time,' she said, ' my chicks,'
And, taking little time to fix,
 Away they flew ;
All fluttering, soaring, often grounding,
Decamped without a trumpet sounding.





BOOK V.

I.

'THE WOODMAN AND MERCURY.¹

TO M. THE CHEVALIER DE BOUILLON.²

YOUR taste has served my work to guide ;
To gain its suffrage I have tried.
You 'd have me shun a care too nice,
Or beauty at too dear a price,
Or too much effort, as a vice.

My taste with yours agrees :
Such effort cannot please ;
And too much pains about the polish
Is apt the substance to abolish ;
Not that it would be right or wise
The graces all to ostracize.
You love them much when delicate ;
Nor is it left for me to hate.

As to the scope of Æsop's plan,⁸

I fail as little as I can.

If this my rhymed and measured speech

Availeth not to please or teach,

I own it not a fault of mine ;

Some unknown reason I assign.

 With little strength endued

 For battles rough and rude,

Or with Herculean arm to smite,

I show to vice its foolish plight. •

In this my talent wholly lies ;

Not that it does at all suffice.

My fable sometimes brings to view

The face of vanity purblind,

With that of restless envy joined ;

And life now turns upon these pivots two.

Such is the silly little frog

That aped the ox upon her bog.

A double image sometimes shows

How vice and folly do oppose

The ways of virtue and good sense ;

As lambs with wolves so grim and gaunt,

The silly fly and frugal ant.

Thus swells my work, — a comedy immense, —

Its acts unnumbered and diverse.

Its scene the boundless universe.

Gods, men, and brutes, all play their part

In fields of nature or of art,

And Jupiter among the rest.
Here comes the god who 's wont to bear
Jove's frequent errands to the fair,
With wingèd heels and haste ;
But other work 's in hand to-day.

A man that laboured in the wood
Had lost his honest livelihood ;
That is to say,
His axe was gone astray.
He had no tools to spare ;
This wholly earned his fare.
Without a hope beside,
He sat him down and cried,
'Alas, my axe ! where can it be ?
O Jove ! but send it back to me,
And it shall strike good blows for thee.'
His prayer in high Olympus heard,
Swift Mercury started at the word.
'Your axe must not be lost,' said he :
'Now, will you know it when you see ?
An axe I found upon the road.'
With that an axe of gold he showed.
'Is 't this ?' The woodman answered, '**Nay.**'
An axe of silver, bright and gay,
Refused the honest woodman too.
At last the finder brought to view
An axe of iron, steel, and wood.
'That 's mine.' he said. in jovful mood :

‘With that I ’ll quite contented be.’
The god replied, ‘I give the three,
As due reward of honesty.’
This luck when neighbouring choppers knew,
They lost their axes, not a few,
And sent their prayers to Jupiter
So fast, he knew not which to hear.
His wingèd son, however, sent
With gold and silver axes, went.
Each would have thought himself a fool
Not to have owned the richest tool.
But Mercury promptly gave, instead
Of it, a blow upon the head.
With simple truth to be contented,
Is surest not to be repented ;
 But still there are who would
 With evil trap the good, —
 Whose cunning is but stupid,
 For Jove is never dupèd.

II.

THE EARTHEN POT AND THE IRON POT.⁴

AN iron pot proposed
To an earthen pot a journey.
The latter was opposed,
Expressing the concern he
Had felt about the danger
Of going out a ranger.
He thought the kitchen hearth
The safest place on earth
For one so very brittle.
'For thee, who art a kettle,
And hast a tougher skin,
There 's nought to keep thee in.'
'I 'll be thy body-guard,'
Replied the iron pot ;
'If anything that 's hard
Should threaten thee a jot,
Between you I will go,
And save thee from the blow.'
This offer him persuaded.
The iron pot paraded
Himself as guard and guide
Close at his cousin's side.
Now, in their tripod way,
They hobble as they may ;

And eke together bolt
 At every little jolt, —
 Which gives the crockery pain ;
 But presently his comrade hits
 So hard, he dashes him to bits,
 Before he can complain.

Take care that you associate
 With equals only, lest your fate
 Between these pots should find its mate.

III.

THE LITTLE FISH AND THE FISHER.⁶

A LITTLE fish will grow,
 If life be spared, a great ;
 But yet to let him go,
 And for his growing wait,
 May not be very wise,
 As 't is not sure your bait
 Will catch him when of size.

Upon a river bank, a fisher took
 A tiny troutling from his hook.
 Said he, ' 'T will serve to count, **at least,**
 As the beginning of my feast ;
 And so I 'll put it with the rest.'

This little fish, thus caught,
 His clemency besought.
 'What will your honour do with me?
 I'm not a mouthful, as you see.
 Pray let me grow to be a trout,
 And then come here and fish me out.
 Some alderman, who likes things nice,
 Will buy me then at any price.
 But now, a hundred such you'll have to fish,
 To make a single good-for-nothing dish.'
 'Well, well, be it so,' replied the fisher,
 'My little fish, who play the preacher,
 The frying-pan must be your lot,
 Although, no doubt, you like it not:
 I fry the fry that can be got.'

In some things, men of sense
 Prefer the present to the future tense.

IV.

THE EARS OF THE HARE.⁶

SOME beast with horns did gore
 The lion; and that sovereign dread,
 Resolved to suffer so no more,
 Straight banished from his realm, 't is said,

All sorts of beasts with horns, —
Rams, bulls, goats, stags, and unicorns.

Such brutes all promptly fled.

A hare, the shadow of his ears perceiving,
Could hardly help believing

That some vile spy for horns would take them,
And food for accusation make them.

‘Adieu,’ said he, ‘my neighbour cricket ;
I take my foreign ticket.

My ears, should I stay here,
Will turn to horns, I fear ;
And were they shorter than a bird’s,
I fear the effect of words.’

‘These horns !’ the cricket answered ; ‘why,
God made them ears who can deny?’

‘Yes,’ said the coward, ‘still they’ll make them horns,
And horns perhaps of unicorns !

In vain shall I protest,
With all the learning of the schools :
My reasons they will send to rest
In th’ Hospital of Fools.’’

V.

THE FOX WITH HIS TAIL CUT OFF.⁸

A CUNNING old fox, of plundering habits,
Great crauncher of fowls, great catcher of rabbits,
Whom none of his sort had caught in a nap,
Was finally caught in somebody's trap.

By luck he escaped, not wholly and hale,
For the price of his luck was the loss of his tail.

Escaped in this way, to save his disgrace,

He thought to get others in similar case.

One day that the foxes in council were met,

'Why wear we,' said he, 'this cumbering weight,

Which sweeps in the dirt wherever it goes?

Pray tell me its use, if any one knows.

 If the council will take my advice,

 We shall dock off our tails in a trice.'

'Your advice may be good,' said one on the ground ;

'But, ere I reply, pray turn yourself round.'

Whereat such a shout from the council was heard,

Poor bob-tail, confounded, could say not a word.

To urge the reform would have wasted his breath.

Long tails were the mode till the day of his death.

VI.

THE OLD WOMAN AND HER TWO
SERVANTS.⁹

A BELDAM kept two spinning maids,
Who plied so handily their trades,
Those spinning sisters down below
Were bunglers when compared with these.
No care did this old woman know
But giving tasks as she might please.
No sooner did the god of day
His glorious locks enkindle,
Than both the wheels began to play,
And from each whirling spindle
Forth danced the thread right merrily,
And back was coiled unceasingly.
Soon as the dawn, I say, its tresses showed,
A graceless cock most punctual crowed.
The beldam roused, more graceless yet,
In greasy petticoat bedight,
Struck up her farthing light,
And then forthwith the bed beset,
Where deeply, blessedly did snore
Those two maid-servants tired and poor.
One oped an eye, an arm one stretched,
And both their breath most sadly fetched,

This threat concealing in the sigh, —
‘That cursed cock shall surely die!’
And so he did: they cut his throat,
And put to sleep his rousing note.
And yet this murder mended not
The cruel hardship of their lot;
For now the twain were scarce in bed
Before they heard the summons dread.
The beldam, full of apprehension
Lest oversleep should cause detention,
Ran like a goblin through her mansion.

Thus often, when one thinks

To clear himself from ill,

His effort only sinks

Him in the deeper still.

The beldam acting for the cock,

Was Scylla for Charybdis’ rock.

VII.

THE SATYR AND THE TRAVELLER.²⁰

WITHIN a savage forest grot

A satyr and his chips

Were taking down their porridge hot;

Their cups were at their lips.

You might have seen in mossy den,
Himself, his wife, and brood ;
They had not tailor-clothes, like men,
But appetites as good.

In came a traveller, benighted,
All hungry, cold, and wet,
Who heard himself to eat invited
With nothing like regret.

He did not give his host the pain
His asking to repeat ;
But first he blew with might and main
To give his fingers heat.

Then in his steaming porridge dish
He delicately blew.
The wondering satyr said, ' I wish
The use of both I knew.'

'Why, first, my blowing warms my hand,
And then it cools my porridge.'
'Ah !' said his host, ' then understand
I cannot give you storage.

'To sleep beneath one roof with you,
I may not be so bold.
Far be from me that mouth untrue
Which blows both hot and cold.'

VIII.

THE HORSE AND THE WOLF.¹¹

A WOLF, what time the thawing breeze
Renews the life of plants and trees,
And beasts go forth from winter lair
To seek abroad their various fare, —
A wolf, I say, about those days,
In sharp look-out for means and ways,
Espied a horse turned out to graze.
His joy the reader may opine.
'Once got,' said he, 'this game were fine ;
But if a sheep, 't were sooner mine.
I can't proceed my usual way ;
Some trick must now be put in play.'

 This said,

 He came with measured tread,
As if a healer of disease, —
Some pupil of Hippocrates, —
And told the horse, with learned verbs,
He knew the power of roots and herbs, —
Whatever grew about those borders, —
 And not at all to flatter
 Himself in such a matter,
 Could cure of all disorders.

If he, Sir Horse, would not conceal
The symptoms of his case,
He, Doctor Wolf, would gratis heal ;
For that to feed in such a place,
And run about untied,
Was proof itself of some disease,
As all the books decide.
'I have, good doctor, if you please,'
Replied the horse, 'as I presume,
Beneath my foot, an apothume.'
'My son,' replied the learned leech,
'That part, as all our authors teach,
Is strikingly susceptible
Of ills which make acceptable
What you may also have from me, —
The aid of skilful surgery ;
Which noble art, the fact is,
For horses of the blood I practise.'
The fellow, with this talk sublime,
Watched for a snap the fitting time.
Meanwhile, suspicious of some trick,
The wary patient nearer draws,
And gives his doctor such a kick,
As makes a chowder of his jaws.
Exclaimed the wolf, in sorry plight,
'I own those heels have served **me**
right.

I erred to quit my trade,
 As I will not in future ;
 Me nature surely made
 For nothing but a butcher.'

IX. ✓

THE PLOUGHMAN AND HIS SONS.¹⁸

THE farmer's patient care and toil
 Are oftener wanting than the soil.

A wealthy ploughman, drawing near his end,
Called in his sons apart from every friend,
 And said, 'When of your sire bereft,
 The heritage our fathers left
 Guard well, nor sell a single field.
 A treasure in it is concealed :
 The place, precisely, I don't know,
 But industry will serve to show.
 The harvest past, 'Time's forelock take,
 And search with plough and spade and rake ;
 Turn over every inch of sod,
 Nor leave unsearched a single clod.'

The father died. The sons — and not in vain —
 Turned o'er the soil, and o'er again ;
 That year their acres bore
 More grain than e'er before.

Though hidden money found they none,
 Yet had their father wisely done,
 To show by such a measure
 That toil itself is treasure.

X.

THE MOUNTAIN IN LABOUR.¹³

A MOUNTAIN was in travail pang ;
 The country with her clamour rang.
 Out ran the people all, to see,
 Supposing that the birth would be
 A city, or at least a house.
 It was a mouse !

In thinking of this fable,
 Of story feigned and false,
 But meaning veritable,
 My mind the image calls
 Of one who writes, 'The war I sing
Which Titans waged against the Thunder-king.'¹⁴
 As on the sounding verses ring,
 What will be brought to birth?
 Why, dearth.

XI.

FORTUNE AND THE BOY.¹⁵

BESIDE a well, uncurbed and deep,
A schoolboy laid him down to sleep :
(Such rogues can do so anywhere.)
If some kind man had seen him there,
He would have leaped as if distracted ;
But Fortune much more wisely acted ;
For, passing by, she softly waked the child,
Thus whispering in accents mild :

‘ I save your life, my little dear,
And beg you not to venture here
Again, for had you fallen in,
I should have had to bear the sin ;
But I demand, in reason’s name,
If for your rashness I ’m to blame ? ’

With this the goddess went her way.
I like her logic, I must say.
There takes place nothing on this planet,
But Fortune ends, whoe’er began it.
In all adventures, good or ill,
We look to her to foot the bill.
Has one a stupid, empty pate,
That serves him never till too late,
He clears himself by blaming Fate !



“Fortune and the Boy.”



XII.

THE DOCTORS.¹⁶

THE selfsame patient put to test
Two doctors, Fear-the-worst and Hope-the-best.
The latter hoped ; the former did maintain
The man would take all medicine in vain.
By different cures the patient was beset,
But ere long cancelled nature's debt,
While nursed
As was prescribed by Fear-the-worst.
But over the disease both triumphed still.
Said one, ' I well foresaw his death.'
' Yes,' said the other, ' but my pill
Would certainly have saved his breath.'

XIII.

THE HEN WITH THE GOLDEN EGGS.¹⁷

How avarice loseth all,
By striving all to gain,
I need no witness call
But him whose thrifty hen,
As by the fable we are told,
Laid every day an egg of gold.

‘She hath a treasure in her body,’
Bethinks the avaricious noddy.
He kills and opens, — vexed to find
All things like hens of common kind.
Thus spoiled the source of all his riches,
To misers he a lesson teaches.
In these last changes of the moon,
How often doth one see
Men made as poor as he
By force of getting rich too soon !

XIV.

THE ASS CARRYING RELICS.¹⁸

AN ass, with relics for his load,
Supposed the worship on the road
Meant for himself alone,
And took on lofty airs,
Receiving as his own
The incense and the prayers.
Some one, who saw his great mistake,
Cried, ‘Master Donkey, do not make
Yourself so big a fool.
Not you they worship, but your pack ;

They praise the idols on your back,
And count yourself a paltry tool.'

'T is thus a brainless magistrate
Is honoured for his robe of state.

XV.

THE STAG AND THE VINE.¹⁹

A STAG, by favour of a vine,
Which grew where suns most genial shine,
And formed a thick and matted bower
Which might have turned a summer shower,
Was saved from ruinous assault.
The hunters thought their dogs at fault,
And called them off. In danger now no more,
The stag, a thankless wretch and vile,
Began to browse his benefactress o'er.
The hunters, listening the while,
The rustling heard, came back,
With all their yelping pack,
And seized him in that very place.
'This is,' said he, 'but justice, in my case.
Let every black ingrate
Henceforward profit by my fate.'

The dogs fell to — 't were wasting breath
 To pray those hunters at the death.
 They left, and we will not revile 'em,
 A warning for profaners of asylum.

XVI.

THE SERPENT AND THE FILE.²⁰

A SERPENT, neighbour to a smith
 (A neighbour bad to meddle with),
 Went through his shop, in search of food,
 But nothing found, 't is understood,
 To eat, except a file of steel,
 Of which he tried to make a meal.
 The file, without a spark of passion,
 Addressed him in the following fashion :
 ' Poor simpleton ! you surely bite
 With less of sense than appetite :
 For ere from me you gain
 One quarter of a grain,
 You 'll break your teeth from ear to ear.
 Time's are the only teeth I fear.'

This tale concerns those men of letters,
 Who, good for nothing, bite their betters.

Their biting so is quite unwise.

Think you, ye literary sharks,

Your teeth will leave their marks

Upon the deathless works you criticise?

Fie ! fie ! fie ! men !

To you they're brass, they're steel, they're diamond !

XVII.

THE HARE AND THE PARTRIDGE.

BEWARE how you deride

The exiles from life's sunny side :

To you is little known

How soon their case may be your **own**.

On this, sage Æsop gives a tale or two,

As in my verses I propose to do. .

A field in common share

A partridge and a hare,

And live in peaceful state,

Till, woeful to relate !

The hunters' mingled cry

Compels the hare to fly.

He hurries to his fort,

And spoils almost the sport

By faulting every hound

That yelps upon the ground.

At last his reeking heat
Betrays his snug retreat.
Old Tray, with philosophic nose,
Snuffs carefully, and grows
So certain, that he cries,
 ‘The hare is here ; bow wow !’
And veteran Ranger now, —
The dog that never lies, —
‘The hare is gone,’ replies.
Alas ! poor, wretched hare,
Back comes he to his lair,
To meet destruction there !
The partridge, void of fear,
Begins her friend to jeer :
‘You bragged of being fleet ;
How serve you, now, your feet ?’
Scarce has she ceased to speak, —
The laugh yet in her beak, —
When comes her turn to die,
From which she could not fly.
She thought her wings, indeed,
Enough for every need ;
But in her laugh and talk,
Forgot the cruel hawk !

XVIII.

THE EAGLE AND THE OWL.²¹

THE eagle and the owl, resolved to cease
 Their war, embraced in pledge of peace.
 On faith of king, on faith of owl, they swore
 That they would eat each other's chicks no more.

'But know you mine?' said Wisdom's bird.²²

'Not I, indeed,' the eagle cried.

'The worse for that,' the owl replied :

'I fear your oath's a useless word ;

I fear that you, as king, will not

Consider duly who or what :

You kings and gods, of what's before ye,

Are apt to make one category.

Adieu, my young, if you should meet them !'

'Describe them, then, or let me greet them,

And, on my life, I will not eat them,'

The eagle said. The owl replied :

'My little ones, I say with pride,

For grace of form cannot be matched, —

The prettiest birds that e'er were hatched ;

By this you cannot fail to know them ;

'T is needless, therefore, that I show them.

Pray don't forget, but keep this mark in view,

Lest fate should curse my happy nest by you.'

At length God gives the owl a set of heirs,
And while at early eve abroad he fares,

In quest of birds and mice for food,

Our eagle haply spies the brood,

As on some craggy rock they sprawl,

Or nestle in some ruined wall

(But which it matters not at all),

And thinks them ugly little frights,

Grim, sad, with voice like shrieking sprites.

'These chicks,' says he, 'with looks almost infernal,
Can't be the darlings of our friend nocturnal.

I'll sup of them.' And so he did, not slightly :

He never sups, if he can help it, lightly.

The owl returned ; and, sad, he found

Nought left but claws upon the ground.

He prayed the gods above and gods below

To smite the brigand who had caused his woe.

Quoth one, 'On you alone the blame must fall ;

Or rather on the law of nature,

Which wills that every earthly creature

Shall think its like the loveliest of all.

You told the eagle of your young ones' graces ;

You gave the picture of their faces :

Had it of likeness any traces ?'

XIX.

THE LION GOING TO WAR.²⁸

THE lion had an enterprise in hand ;
 Held a war-council, sent his provost-marshal,
 And gave the animals a call impartial, —
 Each, in his way, to serve his high command.
 The elephant should carry on his back
 The tools of war, the mighty public pack,
 And fight in elephantine way and form ;
 The bear should hold himself prepared to storm ;
 The fox all secret stratagems should fix ;
 The monkey should amuse the foe by tricks.
 ‘Dismiss,’ said one, ‘the blockhead asses,
 And hares, too cowardly and fleet.’
 ‘No,’ said the king ; ‘I use all classes ;
 Without their aid my force were incomplete.
 The ass shall be our trumpeter, to scare
 Our enemy. And then the nimble hare
 Our royal bulletins shall homeward bear.’

A monarch provident and wise
 Will hold his subjects all of consequence,
 And know in each what talent lies.
 There’s nothing useless to a man of sense.

XX.

THE BEAR AND THE TWO COMPANIONS.²⁴

Two fellows, needing funds, and bold,
A bearskin to a furrier sold,
Of which the bear was living still,
But which they presently would kill, —
 At least they said they would.
 And, if their word was good,
It was a king of bears, — an Ursa Major, —
 The biggest bear beneath the sun.
Its skin, the chaps would wager,
 Was cheap at double cost ;
 'T would make one laugh at frost,
 And make two robes as well as one.
Old Dindenaut,²⁵ in sheep who dealt,
Less prized his sheep than they their pelt
 (In their account 't was theirs,
 But in his own, the bear's).
By bargain struck upon the skin,
Two days at most must bring it in,
Forth went the two. More easy found than got,
The bear came growling at them on the trot.
Behold our dealers both confounded,
As if by thunderbolt astounded !

Their bargain vanished suddenly in air ;
 For who could plead his interest with a bear ?

One of the friends sprung up a tree ;

The other, cold as ice could be,

Fell on his face, feigned death,

And closely held his breath, —

He having somewhere heard it said

The bear ne'er preys upon the dead.

Sir Bear, sad blockhead, was deceived, —

The prostrate man a corpse believed ;

But, half suspecting some deceit,

He feels and snuffs from head to feet,

And in the nostrils blows.

The body's surely dead, he thinks.

'I'll leave it,' says he, 'for it stinks ;'

And off into the woods he goes.

The other dealer, from his tree

Descending cautiously, to see

His comrade lying in the dirt,

Consoling, says, 'It is a wonder

That, by the monster forced asunder,

We're, after all, more scared than hurt.

But,' addeth he, 'what of the creature's skin ?

He held his muzzle very near ;

What did he whisper in your ear ?'

'He gave this caution : "Never dare

Again to sell the skin of bear

Its owner has not ceased to wear."' 26

XXI.

THE ASS DRESSED IN THE LION'S SKIN.²¹

CLAD in a lion's shaggy hide,
An ass spread terror far and wide,
And, though himself a coward brute,
Put all the world to scampering rout :
 But, by a piece of evil luck,
 A portion of an ear outstuck,
 Which soon revealed the error
 Of all the panic terror.

Old Martin did his office quick.
Surprised were all who did not know the trick,
 To see that Martin,²⁸ at his will,
 Was driving lions to the mill !

In France, the men are not a few
Of whom this fable proves too true ;
Whose valour chiefly doth reside
In coat they wear and horse they ride.





BOOK VI.



I.

THE SHEPHERD AND THE LION.¹

Of fables judge not by their face ;
They give the simplest brute a teacher's place.
Bare precepts were inert and tedious things ;
The story gives them life and wings.

But story for the story's sake
Were sorry business for the wise ;
As if, for pill that one should take,
You gave the sugary disguise.
For reasons such as these,
Full many writers great and good
Have written in this frolic mood,
And made their wisdom please.

But tinselled style they all have shunned **with care** ;
With them one never sees a word to spare.
Of Phædrus some have blamed the brevity,
While Æsop uses fewer words than he.

A certain Greek,² however, beats
Them both in his laconic feats.
Each tale he locks in verses four ;
The well or ill I leave to critic lore.
At Æsop's side to see him let us aim,
Upon a theme substantially the same.
The one selects a lover of the chase ;
A shepherd comes, the other's tale to grace.
Their tracks I keep, though either tale may grow
A little in its features as I go.

The one which Æsop tells is nearly this :
A shepherd from his flock began to miss,
And longed to catch the stealer of, his sheep.
Before a cavern, dark and deep,
Where wolves retired by day to sleep,
Which he suspected as the thieves,
He set his trap among the leaves ;
And, ere he left the place,
He thus invoked celestial grace :
' O king of all the powers divine,
Against the rogue but grant me this delight,
That this my trap may catch him in my sight,
And I, from twenty calves of mine,
Will make the fattest thine.'
But while the words were on his tongue,
Forth came a lion great and strong.

Down crouched the man of sheep, and said,
 With shivering fright half dead,
 'Alas ! that man should never be aware
 Of what may be the meaning of his prayer !
 To catch the robber of my flocks,
 O king of gods, I pledged a calf to thee :
 If from his clutches thou wilt rescue me,
 I 'll raise my offering to an ox.'

'T is thus the master-author ⁸ tells the story :
 Now hear the rival of his glory.

II.

THE LION AND THE HUNTER.⁴

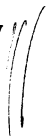
A BRAGGART, lover of the chase,
 Had lost a dog of valued race,
 And thought him in a lion's maw.
 He asked a shepherd whom he saw,
 'Pray show me, man, the robber's place,
 And I 'll have justice in the case.'
 'T is on this mountain side,'
 The shepherd man replied.
 'The tribute of a sheep I pay,
 Each month, and where I please I stray.'
 Out leaped the lion as he spake,
 And came that way, with agile feet.

The braggart, prompt his flight to take,
Cried, 'Jove, O grant a safe retreat!'

A danger close at hand
Of courage is the test.
It shows us who will stand,
Whose legs will run their best.

III.

PHŒBUS AND BOREAS.⁵

OLD Boreas and the sun, one day
Espied a traveller on his way,
Whose dress did happily provide
Against whatever might betide. 
The time was autumn, when, indeed,
All prudent travellers take heed.
The rains that then the sunshine dash,
And Iris with her splendid sash,
Warn one who does not like to soak
To wear abroad a good thick cloak.
Our man was therefore well bedight
With double mantle, strong and tight.
'This fellow,' said the wind, 'has meant
To guard from every ill event;
But little does he wot that I

Can blow him such a blast
That, not a button fast,
His cloak shall cleave the sky.
Come, here 's a pleasant game, Sir Sun!
Wilt play?' Said Phœbus, 'Done!
We 'll bet between us here
Which first will take the gear
From off this cavalier.
Begin, and shut away
The brightness of my ray.'
'Enough.' Our blower, on the bet,
Swelled out his pursy form
With all the stuff for storm, —
The thunder, hail, and drenching wet,
And all the fury he could muster;
Then, with a very demon's bluster,
He whistled, whirled, and splashed,
And down the torrents dashed,
Full many a roof uptearing
He never did before,
Full many a vessel bearing
To wreck upon the shore, —
And all to doff a single cloak.
But vain the furious stroke;
The traveller was stout,
And kept the tempest out,
Defied the hurricane,
Defied the pelting rain;

And as the fiercer roared the blast,
 His cloak the tighter held he fast.
 The sun broke out, to win the bet ;
 He caused the clouds to disappear,
 Refreshed and warmed the cavalier,
 And through his mantle made him sweat,
 'Till off it came, of course,
 In less than half an hour ;
 And yet the sun saved half his power. —
So much doth mildness more than force.

IV.

JUPITER AND THE FARMER.⁶

OF yore, a farm had Jupiter to rent ;
 To advertise it, Mercury was sent.
 The farmers, far and near,
 Flocked round, the terms to hear ;
 And, calling to their aid
 The various tricks of trade,
 One said 't was rash a farm to hire
 Which would so much expense require ;
 Another, that, do what you would,
 The farm would still be far from good.
 While thus, in market style, its faults were told,
 One of the crowd, less wise than bold,

Would give so much, on this condition,
That Jove would yield him altogether
The choice and making of his weather, —
That, instantly on his decision,
His various crops should feel the power
Of heat or cold, of sun or shower.

Jove yields. The bargain closed, our man
Rains, blows, and takes the care
Of all the changes of the air,
On his peculiar, private plan.
His nearest neighbours felt it not,
And all the better was their lot.
Their year was good, by grace divine ;
The grain was rich, and full the vine.
The renter, failing altogether,
The next year made quite different weather ;
And yet the fruit of all his labours
Was far inferior to his neighbours'.
What better could he do? To Heaven
He owns at last his want of sense,
And so is graciously forgiven.
Hence we conclude that Providence
Knows better what we need
Than we ourselves, indeed.

V.

THE COCKEREL, THE CAT, AND THE
YOUNG MOUSE.⁷

A YOUTHFUL mouse, not up to trap,
Had almost met a sad mishap.
The story hear him thus relate,

With great importance to his mother :

‘I passed the mountain bounds of this estate,
And off was trotting on another,
Like some young rat with nought to do
But see things wonderful and new,
When two strange creatures came in view.
The one was mild, benign, and gracious ;
The other, turbulent, rapacious,
With voice terrific, shrill, and rough,
And on his head a bit of stuff
That looked like raw and bloody meat,
Raised up a sort of arms, and beat
The air, as if he meant to fly,
And bore his plummy tail on high.’

A cock, that just began to crow,
As if some nondescript,
From far New Holland shipped,
Was what our mousling pictured so.

He beat his arms,' said he, 'and raised his
voice,

And made so terrible a noise,
That I, who, thanks to Heaven, may justly boast
Myself as bold as any mouse,

Scud off (his voice would even scare a ghost !)

And cursed himself and all his house ;
For, but for him, I should have stayed,
And doubtless an acquaintance made
With her who seemed so mild and good.

Like us, in velvet cloak and hood,
She wears a tail that 's full of grace,
A very sweet and humble face, —
No mouse more kindness could desire, —
And yet her eye is full of fire.

I do believe the lovely creature
A friend of rats and mice by nature.
Her ears, though, like herself, they 're bigger,
Are just like ours in form and figure.

To her I was approaching, when,
Aloft on what appeared his den,
The other screamed, — and off I fled.'

'My son,' his cautious mother said,
 'That sweet one was the cat,
 The mortal foe of mouse and rat,
 Who seeks by smooth deceit,
 Her appetite to treat.

So far the other is from that,

We yet may eat
 His dainty meat ;
 Whereas the cruel cat,
 Whene'er she can, devours
 No other meat than ours.'

Remember while you live,
 It is by looks that men deceive.

VI.

THE FOX, THE MONKEY, AND THE
ANIMALS.⁸

LEFT kingless by the lion's death,
 The beasts once met, our story saith,
 Some fit successor to install.
 Forth from a dragon-guarded, moated place,
 The crown was brought, and, taken from its case,
 And being tried by turns on all,
 The heads of most were found too small ;
 Some hornèd were, and some too big ;
 Not one would fit the regal gear.
 For ever ripe for such a rig,
 The monkey, looking very queer,
 Approached with antics and grimaces,
 And, after scores of monkey faces,

With what would seem a gracious stoop,
Passed through the crown as through a hoop.

The beasts, diverted with the thing,
Did homage to him as their king.

The fox alone the vote regretted,
But yet in public never fretted.

When he his compliments had paid
To royalty, thus newly made,

'Great sire, I know a place,' said he,

'Where lies concealed a treasure,
Which, by the right of royalty,

Should bide your royal pleasure.'

The king lacked not an appetite

For such financial pelf,

And, not to lose his royal right,

Ran straight to see it for himself.

It was a trap, and he was caught.

Said Renard, 'Would you have it thought,

You ape, that you can fill a throne,

And guard the rights of all, alone,

Not knowing how to guard your own?'

The beasts all gathered from the farce,

That stuff for kings is very scarce.

VII.

THE MULE BOASTING OF HIS GENE-
ALOGY.⁹

A PRELATE'S mule of noble birth was proud,
And talked, incessantly and loud,
Of nothing but his dam, the mare,
Whose mighty deeds by him recounted were, —
This had she done, and had been present there, —
By which her son made out his claim
To notice on the scroll of Fame.
Too proud, when young, to bear a doctor's pill ;
When old, he had to turn a mill.
As there they used his limbs to bind,
His sire, the ass, was brought to mind.
Misfortune, were its only use
The claims of folly to reduce,
And bring men down to sober reason,
Would be a blessing in its season.

VIII.

THE OLD MAN AND THE ASS.¹⁰

AN old man, riding on his ass,
Had found a spot of thrifty grass,
And there turned loose his weary beast
Old Grizzle, pleased with such a feast,

Flung up his heels, and capered round,
Then rolled and rubbed upon the ground,
And frisked and browsed and brayed,
And many a clean spot made.

Armed men came on them as he 'fed :

'Let 's fly,' in haste the old man said.

'And wherefore so?' the ass replied ;

'With heavier burdens will they ride?'

'No,' said the man, already started.

'Then,' cried the ass, as he departed,

'I'll stay, and be — no matter whose ;

Save you yourself, and leave me loose.

But let me tell you, ere you go

(I speak plain French, you know),

My master is my only foe.'

IX.

THE STAG SEEING HIMSELF IN THE WATER.¹¹

BESIDE a placid, crystal flood,

A stag admired the branching wood

That high upon his forehead stood,

But gave his Maker little thanks

For what he called his spindle shanks.

'What limbs are these for such a head !

So mean and slim !' with grief he said.

'My glorious head o'ertops
The branches of the copse ;
My legs are my disgrace.'

As thus he talked, a bloodhound gave him **chase**.

To save his life he flew
Where forests thickest grew.
His horns, — pernicious ornament ! —
Arresting him where'er he went,
Did unavailing render
What else, in such a strife,
Had saved his precious life, —
His legs, as fleet as slender.
Obliged to yield, he cursed the gear
Which nature gave him every year.

Too much the beautiful we prize ;
The useful, often, we despise :
Yet oft, as happened to the stag,
The former doth to ruin drag.

X.

THE HARE AND THE TORTOISE.¹⁸

To win a race, the⁹ swiftness of a dart
Availeth not without a timely start.
The hare and tortoise are my witnesses.
Said tortoise to the swiftest thing that is,

'I 'll bet that you 'll not reach so soon as I
The tree on yonder hill we spy.'

'So soon! Why, madam, are you frantic?'

Replied the creature, with an antic ;

'Pray take, your senses to restore,
A grain or two of hellebore.'¹³

'Say,' said the tortoise, 'what you will ;
I dare you to the wager still.'

'T was done ; the stakes were paid,
And near the goal tree laid, —

Of what, is not a question for this place,
Nor who it was that judged the race.

Our hare had scarce five jumps to make,
Of such as he is wont to take,

When, starting just before their beaks,

He leaves the hounds at leisure,

Thence till the kalends of the Greeks,¹⁴

The sterile heath to measure.

Thus having time to browse and doze,

And list which way the zephyr blows,

He makes himself content to wait,

And let the tortoise go her gait

In solemn, senatorial state.

She starts ; she moils on, modestly and lowly,

And with a prudent wisdom hastens slowly ;

But he, meanwhile, the victory despises,

Thinks lightly of such prizes,

Believes it for his honour

To take late start and gain upon her.

So, feeding, sitting at his ease,
 He meditates of what you please,
 Till his antagonist he sees
 Approach the goal ; then starts,
 Away like lightning darts :
 But vainly does he run ;
 The race is by the tortoise won.
 Cries she, ' My senses do I lack ?
 What boots your boasted swiftness now ?
 You 're beat ! and yet, you must allow,
 I bore my house upon my back.'

XI.

THE ASS AND HIS MASTERS.¹⁵

A GARDENER'S ass complained to Destiny
 Of being made to rise before the dawn.
 ' The cocks their matins have not sung,' said he,
 ' Ere I am up and gone.
 And all for what ? To market herbs, it seems.
 Fine cause, indeed, to interrupt my dreams !'
 Fate, moved by such a prayer,
 Sent him a currier's load to bear,
 Whose hides so heavy and ill-scented were,
 They almost choked the foolish beast.
 ' I wish me with my former lord,' he said ;
 ' For then, whene'er he turned his head,

If on the watch, I caught
 A cabbage-leaf, which cost me nought.
 But, in this horrid place, I find
 No chance or windfall of the kind ; —
 Or if, indeed, I do,
 The cruel blows I rue.
 Anon it came to pass
 He was a collier's ass.
 Still more complaint. 'What now?' said Fate,
 Quite out of patience.
 'If on this jackass I must wait,
 What will become of kings and nations?
 Has none but he aught here to tease him?
 Have I no business but to please him?'
 And Fate had cause ; for all are so.
 Unsatisfied while here below,
 Our present lot is aye the worst.
 Our foolish prayers the skies infest.
 Were Jove to grant all we request,
 The din renewed, his head would burst.

XII.

THE SUN AND THE FROGS.¹⁶

REJOICING on their tyrant's wedding-day,
 The people drowned their care in drink ;
 While from the general joy did Æsop shrink,
 And showed its folly in this way.

'The sun,' said he, 'once took it in his head
 To have a partner for his bed.
 From swamps and ponds and marshy bogs,
 Up rose the wailings of the frogs.
 'What shall we do, should he have progeny?'
 Said they to Destiny ;
 One sun we scarcely can endure,
 And half-a-dozen, we are sure,
 Will dry the very sea.
 Adieu to marsh and fen !
 Our race will perish then,
 Or be obliged to fix
 Their dwelling in the Styx !
 For such an humble animal,
 The frog, I take it, reasoned well.

XIII.

THE COUNTRYMAN AND THE SERPENT.¹⁷

A COUNTRYMAN, as Æsop certifies,
 A charitable man, but not so wise,
 One day in winter found,
 Stretched on the snowy ground,
 A chilled or frozen snake,
 As torpid as a stake,
 And, if alive, devoid of sense.

He took him up, and bore him home,
And, thinking not what recompense
For such a charity would come,
Before the fire stretched him,
And back to being fetched him.

The snake scarce felt the genial heat
Before his heart with native malice beat.
He raised his head, thrust out his forkèd tongue,
Coiled up, and at his benefactor sprung.
'Ungateful wretch !' said he, 'is this the way
My care and kindness you repay?
Now you shall die.' With that his axe he takes,
And with two blows three serpents makes.
Trunk, head, and tail were separate snakes ;
And, leaping up with all their might,
They vainly sought to reunite.

'T is good and lovely to be kind ;
But charity should not be blind ;
For as to wretchedness ingrate,
You cannot raise it from its wretched state.

XIV.

THE SICK LION AND THE FOX.¹⁸

Sick in his den, we understand,
 The king of beasts sent out command
 That of his vassals every sort
 Should send some deputies to court, —
 With promise well to treat
 Each deputy and suite ;
 On faith of lion, duly written,
None should be scratched, much less be bitten.
 The royal will was executed,
 And some from every tribe deputed ;
 The foxes, only, would not come.
 One thus explained their choice of home :
 ‘Of those who seek the court, we learn,
 The tracks upon the sand
 Have one direction, and
 Not one betokens a return.
 This fact begetting some distrust,
 His majesty at present must
 Excuse us from his great levee.
 His plighted word is good, no doubt ;
But while how beasts get in we see,
 We do not see how they get out.’

XV.

THE FOWLER, THE HAWK, AND THE
LARK.¹⁹

FROM wrongs of wicked men we draw

Excuses for our own :

Such is the universal law.

Would you have mercy shown,

Let yours be clearly known.

A fowler's mirror served to snare

The little tenants of the air.

A lark there saw her pretty face,

And was approaching to the place.

A hawk, that sailed on high

Like vapour in the sky,

Came down, as still as infant's breath,

On her who sang so near her death.

She thus escaped the fowler's steel,

The hawk's malignant claws to feel.

While in his cruel way,

The pirate plucked his prey,

Upon himself the net was sprung.

'O fowler,' prayed he in the hawkish tongue.

'Release me in thy clemency!

I never did a wrong to thee.'

The man replied, ' 'T is true ;

And did the lark to you ?'

XVI.

THE HORSE AND THE ASS.²⁰

IN such a world, all men, of every grade,
Should each the other kindly aid ;
For, if beneath misfortune's goad
A neighbour falls, on you will fall his load.

There jogged in company an ass and horse ;
Nought but his harness did the last endorse ;
The other bore a load that crushed him down,
And begged the horse a little help to give,
Or otherwise he could not reach the town.

' This prayer,' said he, ' is civil, I believe ;
One half this burden you would scarcely feel.'
The horse refused, flung up a scornful heel,
And saw his comrade die beneath the weight :
And saw his wrong too late ;
For on his own proud back
They put the ass's pack,
And over that, beside,
They put the ass's hide.

XVII.

THE DOG THAT DROPPED THE SUB-
STANCE FOR THE SHADOW.²¹

THIS world is full of shadow-chasers,
 Most easily deceived.
 Should I enumerate these racers,
 I should not be believed.
 I send them all to Æsop's dog,
 Which, crossing water on a log,
 Espied the meat he bore, below ;
 To seize its image, let it go ;
 Plunged in ; to reach the shore was glad,
 With neither **what** he hoped, nor what he 'd **had**.

XVIII.

THE CARTER IN THE MIRE.²²

THE Phaëton who drove a load of hay
 Once found his cart bemired.
 Poor man ! the spot was far away
 From human help — retired,
 In some rude country place,
 In Brittany, as near as I can trace,
 Near Quimper Coërentan, —
 A town that poet never sang, —

Which Fate, they say, puts in the traveller's path,
When she would rouse the man to special wrath.

May Heaven preserve us from that route !
But to our carter, hale and stout :
Fast stuck his cart ; he swore his worst,
And, filled with rage extreme,
The mud-holes now he cursed,
And now he cursed his team,
And now his cart and load, —
Anon, the like upon himself bestowed.
Upon the god he called at length,
Most famous through the world for strength.

‘Oh, help me, Hercules !’ cried he ;
‘For if thy back of yore
This burly planet bore,
‘Thy arm can set me free.’

This prayer gone up, from out a cloud there broke
A voice which thus in godlike accents spoke :

‘The suppliant must himself bestir,
Ere Hercules will aid confer.
Look wisely in the proper quarter,
To see what hindrance can be found ;
Remove the execrable mud and mortar,
Which, axle-deep, beset thy wheels around.
Thy sledge and crowbar take,
And pry me up that stone, or break ;
Now fill that rut upon the other side.
Hast done it?’ ‘Yes,’ the man replied.

‘Well,’ said the voice, ‘I’ll aid thee now ;
 Take up thy whip.’ ‘I have . . . but, how?
 My cart glides on with ease !
 I thank thee, Hercules.’
 ‘Thy team,’ rejoined the voice, ‘has light ado ;
 So help thyself, and Heaven will help thee too.’

XIX.

THE CHARLATAN.²⁸

THE world has never lacked its charlatans,
 More than themselves have lacked their plans.
 One sees them on the stage at tricks
 Which mock the claims of sullen Styx.
 What talents in the streets they post !
 One of them used to boast
 Such mastership of eloquence
 That he could make the greatest dunce
 Another Tully Cicero
 In all the arts that lawyers know.
 ‘Ay, sirs, a dunce, a country clown,
 The greatest blockhead of your town, —
 Nay more, an animal, an ass,
 The stupidest that nibbles grass, —
 Needs only through my course to pass
 And he shall wear the gown
 With credit, honour, and renown.’

The prince heard of it, called the man, thus spake :

‘ My stable holds a steed
Of the Arcadian breed,²⁴

Of which an orator I wish to make.’

‘ Well, sire, you can,’

Replied our man.

At once his majesty

Paid the tuition fee.

Ten years must roll, and then the learned ass

Should his examination pass,

According to the rules

Adopted in the schools ;

If not, his teacher was to tread the air,

With haltered neck, above the public square, —

His rhetoric bound on his back,

And on his head the ears of jack.

A courtier told the rhetorician,

With bows and terms polite,

He would not miss the sight

Of that last pendent exhibition ;

For that his grace and dignity

Would well become such high degree ;

And, on the point of being hung,

He would bethink him of his tongue,

And show the glory of his art, —

The power to melt the hardest heart, —

And wage a war with time

By periods sublime, —

A pattern speech for orators thus leaving,
Whose work is vulgarly called thieving.

‘Ah!’ was the charlatan’s reply,
‘Ere that, the king, the ass, or I,
Shall, one or other of us, die.’

And reason good had he ;
We count on life most foolishly,
Though hale and hearty we may be.

In each ten years, death cuts down one in three.

XX.

DISCORD.

THE goddess Discord, having made, on high,
Among the gods a general grapple,
And thence a lawsuit, for an apple,
Was turned out, bag and baggage, from the sky.
The animal called man, with open arms,
Received the goddess of such naughty charms, —
Herself and Whether-or-no, her brother,
With Thine-and-mine, her stingy mother.
In this, the lower universe,
Our hemisphere she chose to curse :
For reasons good she did not please
To visit our antipodes, —

Folks rude and savage like the beasts,
Who, wedding free from forms and priests,
In simple tent or leafy bower,
Make little work for such a power.
That she might know exactly where
Her direful aid was in demand,
Renown flew courier through the land,
Reporting each dispute with care ;
Then she, outrunning Peace, was quickly there ;
And if she found a spark of ire,
Was sure to blow it to a fire.
At length, Renown got out of patience
At random hurrying o'er the nations,
And, not without good reason, thought
A goddess, like her mistress, ought
To have some fixed and certain home,
To which her customers might come ;
For now they often searched in vain.
With due location, it was plain
She might accomplish vastly more,
And more in season than before.
To find, howe'er, the right facilities,
Was harder, then, than now it is ;
For then there were no nunneries.

So, Hymen's inn at last assigned,
Thence lodged the goddess to her mind.²⁵

XXI.

THE YOUNG WIDOW.²⁶

A HUSBAND'S death brings always sighs ;
The widow sobs, sheds tears, — then dries.
Of Time the sadness borrows wings ;
And Time returning pleasure brings.
Between the widow of a year
And of a day, the difference
Is so immense,
That very few who see her
Would think the laughing dame
And weeping one the same.
The one puts on repulsive action.
The other shows a strong attraction.
The one gives up to sighs, or true or false ;
The same sad note is heard, whoever calls.
Her grief is inconsolable,
They say. Not so our fable,
Or, rather, not so says the truth.

To other worlds a husband went,
And left his wife in prime of youth.
Above his dying couch she bent,
And cried, ' My love, oh, wait for me !
My soul would gladly go with thee !'

(But yet it did not go.)

The fair one's sire, a prudent man,
Checked not the current of her woe.

At last he kindly thus began :

' My child, your grief should have its bound.

What boots it him beneath the ground

That you should drown your charms ?

Live for the living, not the dead.

I don't propose that you be led

At once to Hymen's arms ;

But give me leave, in proper time,

To rearrange the broken chime

With one who is as good, at least,

In all respects, as the deceased.'

' Alas !' she sighed, ' the cloister vows

Befit me better than a spouse.'

The father left the matter there.

About one month thus mourned the fair ;

Another month, her weeds arranged ;

Each day some robe or lace she changed,

Till mourning dresses served to grace,

And took of ornament the place.

The frolic band of loves

Came flocking back like doves.

Jokes, laughter, and the dance,

The native growth of France,

Had finally their turn ;

And thus, by night and morn,

She plunged, to tell the truth,
Deep in the fount of youth.
Her sire no longer feared
The dead so much endeared ;
 But, as he never spoke,
 Herself the silence broke :
'Where is that youthful spouse,' said she,
'Whom, sir, you lately promised me?'





EPILOGUE.

HERE check we our career :
Long books I greatly fear.
I would not quite exhaust my stuff ;
The flower of subjects is enough.
To me, the time is come, it seems,
To draw my breath for other themes.
Love, tyrant of my life, commands
That other work be on my hands.
 I dare not disobey.
Once more shall Psyche be my lay.
I'm called by Damon to portray
 Her sorrows and her joys.
I yield : perhaps, while she employs,
My muse will catch a richer glow ;
 And well if this my laboured strain
 Shall be the last and only pain
Her spouse²⁷ shall cause me here below.



NOTES TO VOLUME ONE.

Page 1, note 1. This dedication prefaced La Fontaine's first collection of his Fables, which comprised Books I. to VI., published in 1668. The Dauphin was Louis, the only son of Louis XIV. and Marie-Thérèse of Austria. He was born at Fontainebleau in 1661, and died at Meudon in 1712, before his father, the 'Grand Monarque,' had ceased to reign. The Dauphin being but a child between six and seven years old at the time of this dedication, La Fontaine's act may be viewed rather as an offering to the king, than to the child himself. See the Translator's Preface.

BOOK I.

Page 3, note 2. For the story of this fable, as for the stories of so many of the fables which follow, especially in the first six books, La Fontaine is indebted to the Father of Fable, Æsop the Phrygian. See account of Æsop in the Translator's Preface.

P. 4, n. 3. Both Æsop and Phædrus have a version of this fable.

P. 5, n. 4. The story of this fable is given in Horace, Satires, ii. 3; Phædrus and Corrozet have also versions of it. For an account of Phædrus and his Fables, see the

Translator's Preface. Gilles Corrozet was one of the French fabulists immediately preceding La Fontaine. He was a Parisian bookseller-author who lived between 1516 and 1568.

P. 6, n. 5. *The silver of the tax.* — An allusion to the French *gabelle*, or old salt tax, which, like all taxes levied upon the mass of the people, was a very productive one. Its collection caused several peasants' insurrections.

P. 7, n. 6. Phædrus, iii. 7. — The references to the Fables of Phædrus are to Bohn's edition, which is from the critical edition of Orellius, 1831.

P. 9, n. 7. Phædrus, i. 5. — From this fable come the French proverbial expression, *la part du lion*, and its English equivalent, the 'lion's share.'

P. 10, n. 8. One of Æsop's; Phædrus also gives it, Book IV. 10.

P. 11, n. 9. Æsop.

P. 14, n. 10. *Priam's daughter.* — Cassandra, who predicted the fall of Troy, and was not heeded.

P. 14, n. 11. Horace, Satires, ii. 6; also in Æsop.

P. 15, n. 12. Phædrus, i. 1; also in Æsop.

P. 17, n. 13. This is one of La Fontaine's most admired fables, and is one of the few for which he did not go for the groundwork to some older fabulist. The Duc de la Rochefoucauld, to whom it was dedicated, was the author of the famous '*Réflexions et Maximes Morales*,' which La Fontaine praises in the last lines of his fable. La Rochefoucauld was La Fontaine's friend and patron. The '*Maximes*' had achieved a second edition just prior to La Fontaine's publication of this first series of his Fables in 1668. '*The Rabbits*' (Book X., Fable 15), published in the second collection, in 1678-79, is also dedicated to the duke, who died the following year, 1680. See Translator's Preface.

P. 17, n. 14. *Lady's zone.* — One of La Fontaine's commentators remarks upon this passage that it is no exaggeration of the foppishness of the times in which the poet wrote, and cites the instance that the canons of St. Martin of Tours wore mirrors on their shoes even while officiating in church.

P. 19, n. 15. The original of this fable has been attributed to the chief who made himself emperor of Tartary and called himself Ghengis Khan (b. 1164, d. 1227). He is said to have applied the fable to the Great Mogul and his innumerable dependent potentates.

P. 19, n. 16. *German court.* — The court of the 'Holy Roman Empire' is here meant.

P. 20, n. 17. *Æsop.*

P. 21, n. 18. Phædrus, iv. 24.

P. 21, n. 19. *Malherbe.* — See note to Fable I., Book III.

P. 24, n. 20. *Æsop.*

P. 25, n. 21. *Mæcenas.* — Seneca's Epistles, ci.

P. 25, n. 22. *Æsop*; it is also in Corrozet's fables.

P. 26, n. 23. Phædrus, ii. 2; *Æsop.*

P. 28, n. 24. Phædrus, i. 26; also in *Æsop.*

P. 29, n. 25. A fable telling this story is in the collection of Arabic fables which bear the name of Locman, or Lokman, a personage some identify with *Æsop* himself. Lokman is said to have flourished about 1050 B. C.; and even as the 'Phrygian slave' *Æsop* was said to have been very ugly, so Lokman is described as 'an ugly black slave.' See Translator's Preface. Rabelais also has a version of the story of this fable; *vide* Gargantua, Book I. ch. xlii.

P. 31, n. 26. Phædrus, iii. 11.

P. 31, n. 27. Phædrus, iii. 12.

P. 33, n. 28. *The court has sucked the oyster.* — The humorous idea of the lawyers, the litigants, and the oyster, is more fully treated in Fable IX., Book IX.

P. 33, n. 29. The groundwork of this fable is in Æsop, and also in the Fables of Avianus. Flavius Avianus lived in the fifth century. His Æsopian Fables were written in Latin verse. Caxton printed 'The Fables of Avian, translated into Englyshe,' at the end of his edition of Æsop.

P. 34, n. 30. This fable and 'The Animals sick of the Plague' (Fable I., Book VII.) are generally deemed La Fontaine's two best fables. 'The Oak and the Reed' is held to be the perfection of classical fable, while 'The Animals sick of the Plague' is esteemed for its fine poetic feeling, conjoined with its excellent moral teaching. See Translator's Preface.

BOOK II.

Page 35, note 1. Phædrus, book iv. 7.

P. 35, n. 2. *The plants and trees.*—Aristotle's rule for pure fable is that its *dramatis personæ* should be animals only, — excluding man. Dr. Johnson (writing upon Gay's Fables) agrees in this dictum 'generally.' But hardly any of the fabulists, from Æsop downwards, seem to have bound themselves by the rule; and in this fable we have La Fontaine rather exulting in his assignment of speech, etc., not only to the lower animals, but to 'plants and trees,' etc., as well as otherwise defying the 'hard to suit,' *i. e.*, the critics.

P. 36, n. 3. *Half a dozen baby stories.*—Here La Fontaine exalts his Muse as a fabulist. This is in reply to certain of his critics who pronounced his work puerile, and pretended to wish him to adopt the higher forms of poetry. Some of the fables of the first six books were originally published in a semi-private way before 1668. See the Translator's Preface. La Fontaine defends his art as a writer of fables also in Book III. (Fable I.); Book

V. (Fable I.); Book VI. (Fable I.); Book VII. (Introduction); Book VIII. (Fable IV.); and Book IX. (Fable I.).

P. 38, n. 4. Faerno and Abstemius both have fables upon this subject. Gabriel Faerno (1500-1561) was an Italian writer who published fables in Latin. Perrault translated these into French verse, and published them at Paris in 1699. Faerno was also a famous editor of Terence. Laurentius Abstemius, or Astemio, was an Italian fabulist of the fifteenth century. After their first publication his fables often appeared in editions of Æsop.

P. 38, n. 5. *Rodilard*. — The name no doubt taken from the famous cat Rodilardus (bacon-gnawer), in Rabelais, Pantagruel, IV., ch. lxvii.

P. 40, n. 6. Phædrus, i. 10.

P. 40, n. 7. *Themis*. — The goddess of Justice.

P. 41, n. 8. So Philip of Macedon is said to have decided a suit by condemning the defendant to banishment, and the plaintiff to follow him. The wisdom of each decision lies in taking advantage of a doubtful case to convict two well-known rogues of — previous bad character.

P. 41, n. 9. Phædrus, i. 30.

P. 42, n. 10. Æsop.

X P. 43, n. 11. *Or save his foes!* — La Fontaine's last line is, 'Vive le roi! Vive la ligue!' conveying an allusion to the 'Holy League' of the French Catholic party, which, under the Guises, brought about the war with Henry III. and the Huguenots, which ended, for a time, in the edict of Nantes, promulgated by Henry IV. in 1598.

P. 44, n. 12. Æsop.

P. 44, n. 13. Phædrus, i. 19. See the Translator's Preface.

P. 45, n. 14. Æsop.

P. 48, n. 15. Æsop.

P. 50, n. 16. Æsop.

P. 51, n. 17. *Æsop*. In the original editions of La Fontaine's Fables, XI. and XII. are printed together, and headed 'Fables XI. et XII.'

P. 52, n. 18. *Æsop*.

P. 53, n. 19. *Æsop*. Diogenes Laertius tells the story of this fable of Thales of Miletus. 'It is said that once he (Thales) was led out of his house by an old woman for the purpose of observing the stars, and he fell into a ditch and bewailed himself. On which the old woman said to him, "Do you, O Thales, who cannot see what is under your feet, think that thou shalt understand what is in heaven?"' — *Diogenes Laertius, Bohn's edition*.

P. 56, n. 20. *Æsop*.

P. 57, n. 21. *Æsop*.

P. 59, n. 22. *Æsop*; and Corrozet.

P. 60, n. 23. *Polyphemus*. — The Cyclop king; *vide* Homer's *Odyssey*, book ix.

P. 60, n. 24. Phædrus, iii. 17.

P. 60, n. 25. The peacock was consecrated to Juno, the 'Queen of Heaven,' and was under her protection.

P. 62, n. 26. *Æsop*.

P. 63, n. 27. *Naturam expellas furca, tamen usque recurret*. Hor. *Epist.* book i. 10. — TRANSLATOR.

P. 64, n. 28. Phædrus, i. 11; *Æsop*.

P. 65, n. 29. Phædrus, iv. 5.

P. 65, n. 30. *Areopagus*. — The Athenian Court of Justice, said to have been called *Areiopagos* (the Hill of Ares), because, according to tradition, the first trial there was that of Ares for the murder of Halirrhotius.

BOOK III.

Page 70, note 1. The story of this fable has been used by most of the fabulists, from Æsop downwards.

P. 70, n. 2. In the original editions this fable is dedicated 'A. M. D. M.,' which initials stand for 'To M. De Maucroix,' canon of Rheims, an early and late friend and patron of the poet. See Translator's Preface.

P. 70, n. 3. *Old Malherbe and young Racan.*—French poets. Malherbe was born in 1556, and died in 1628. La Fontaine owed to Malherbe's works the happy inspiration which led him to write poetry. See Translator's Preface. Honorat de Bueil, Marquis de Racan, was born at La Roche Racan in 1589. As a poet he was a pupil of Malherbe. His works were praised by Boileau, and he was one of the earliest members of the French Academy.

P. 73, n. 4. *Nicholas and his Jane.*—An allusion to an old French song.

P. 74, n. 5. Æsop. Rabelais also has a version,—book iii. ch. 3.

P. 74, n. 6. *Boss.*—A word probably more familiar to hod-carriers than to lexicographers; qu. derived from the French *bosseman*, or the English *boatswain*, pronounced *bos'n*. It denotes a 'master' of some practical 'art.' Master Belly, says Rabelais, was the first Master of Arts in the world.—TRANSLATOR. The name used by La Fontaine is 'Messer Gaster.' To which he puts a footnote stating that he meant 'L'estomac.' He took the name from Rabelais, book iv. ch. 57, where it occurs thus: 'Messer Gaster est le premier maître ès arts de ce monde. . . . Son mandement est nommé: Faire le fault, sans delay, ou mourir.'

P. 75, n. 7. *Menenius.*—See Translator's Preface.

P. 76, n. 8. *Rome.*—According to our republican no-

tions of government, these people were somewhat imposed upon. Perhaps the fable finds a more appropriate application in the relation of employer to employed. I leave the fabulists and the political economists to settle the question between them. — TRANSLATOR.

P. 76, n. 9. The story of this fable is traced to Verdizotti, an Italian poet who lived about 1535-1600.

P. 77, n. 10. Æsop; Phædrus, i. 2.

P. 79, n. 11. Æsop; also in Phædrus, iv. 9.

P. 81, n. 12. Phædrus, ii. 4.

P. 83, n. 13. *Pandora's box*. — Pandora, the Eve of the Grecian mythology, was sent to earth with all the human ills and Hope in a box, whence all but Hope escaped. — *Vide* Elton's *Hesiod, Works and Days*, i. 114, Bohn's edition, etc.

P. 83, n. 14. Æsop.

P. 84, n. 15. The story of this fable is told in Petrarch (*Epistles*, iii. 13), and by others.

P. 86, n. 16. Phædrus, i. 8; and Æsop.

P. 87, n. 17. Æsop.

P. 88, n. 18. Æsop; Phædrus, iv. 3.

P. 88, n. 19. Æsop.

P. 89, n. 20. Æsop.

P. 91, n. 21. Phædrus, i. 21.

P. 91, n. 22. Æsop.

P. 91, n. 23. *Progne and Philomel*. — Progne and Philomela, sisters, in mythology. Progne was Queen of Thrace, and was changed into a swallow. Her sister was changed into a nightingale; *vide* Ovid, *Metamorphoses*.

P. 92, n. 24. Verdizotti.

P. 94, n. 25. Æsop; also in Horace, *Epistles*, book i. 7.

P. 95, n. 26. *A vast variety of cases*. — Chamfort says of this passage: 'La Fontaine, with his usual delicacy, here alludes to the king's farmers and other officers in place;

and abruptly quits the subject as if he felt himself on ticklish ground.'

P. 95, n. 27. Phædrus, book iv. 2; also in Æsop and Faerno.

P. 95, n. 28. *Rodilard the Second*. — Another allusion to Rabelais' cat Rodilardus. See Fable II., Book II.

P. 95, n. 29. *Attila*. — The king of the Huns, who, for overrunning half Europe, was termed the Scourge of God.

BOOK IV.

Page 98, note 1. Æsop; also Verdizotti.

P. 98, n. 2. *Mademoiselle de Sévigné*. — Françoise-Marguerite de Sévigné, afterwards Madame de Grignan, the daughter of the celebrated Madame de Sévigné. The famous Sévigné 'Letters' were for the most part addressed to Madame de Grignan. For some account of Madame de Sévigné and La Fontaine, see the Translator's Preface; also note to Fable XI. Book VII.

P. 101, n. 3. Æsop.

P. 102, n. 4. Phædrus, iv. 23.

P. 107, n. 5. Æsop.

P. 109, n. 6. *Martin*. — La Fontaine has 'Martin-bâton,' a name for a groom or hostler armed with his cudgel of office, taken from Rabelais.

P. 109, n. 7. Phædrus, book iv. 6.

P. 110, n. 8. Names of rats, invented by Homer. — TRANSLATOR.

P. 111, n. 9. Æsop.

P. 112, n. 10. Arion. — TRANSLATOR.

According to Herodotus, i. 24 (Bohn's ed., p. 9), Arion, the son of Cyclon of Methymna, and famous lyric poet and musician, having won riches at a musical contest in Sicily, was voyaging home, when the sailors of his ship

determined to murder him for his treasure. He asked to be allowed to play a tune; and as soon as he had finished he threw himself into the sea. It was then found that the music had attracted a number of dolphins round the ship, and one of these took the bard on its back, and conveyed him safely to Tænarus.

P. 113, n. 11. *Æsop*.

P. 115, n. 12. *Æsop*; Phædrus, i. 3.

P. 115, n. 13. *Argus tail of gold and green*.— According to mythology, Argus, surnamed Panoptes (or all-seeing), possessed a hundred eyes, some of which were never closed in sleep. At his death Juno either transformed him into the peacock, or transferred his hundred eyes to the tail of that, her favourite, bird. 'Argus tail of gold and green,' therefore, means tail endowed with the eyes of Argus.

P. 116, n. 14. *Æsop*.

P. 117, n. 15. *Æsop*.

P. 117, n. 16. *Merlin*.— This is Merlin, the wizard of the old French novels.

P. 119, n. 17. The story of this fable has been traced to Gilbert Cousin, in whose works it figures with the title 'De Jovis Ammonis oraculo.' Gilbert Cousin was canon of Nozeret, and wrote between 1506 and 1569.

P. 122, n. 18. Phædrus, iv. 4; Horace (Epistles, book i. 10); and others.

P. 124, n. 19. *Æsop*; Phædrus, i. 7 (The Fox and the Tragic Mask).

P. 125, n. 20. Corrozet; and others.

P. 126, n. 21. *Æsop*; and others.

P. 128, n. 22. Phædrus, iii. 9.

P. 129, n. 23. *Æsop*, Avianus, and others.

P. 129, n. 24. *Phrygian slave*.— *Æsop*. See Translator's Preface.

P. 131, n. 25. *Æsop*.

P. 132, n. 26. Æsop; and others.

P. 134, n. 27. Phædrus, ii. 8 (The Stag and the Oxen); and others.

P. 136, n. 28. Æsop (Aulus Gellius); Avianus.

BOOK V.

Page 140, note 1. Æsop. There is also a version of the story in Rabelais, book iv. Prologue.

P. 140, n. 2. La Fontaine's dedication is in initials thus: 'A. M. L. C. D. E.,' which are interpreted by some as meaning, 'To M: the Chevalier de Bouillon' (as above), and by others as meaning, 'To Monseigneur le Cardinal de Bouillon.'

P. 141, n. 3. *Æsop's plan.* — Here, as in the dedication of Book VII., Fable II., Book I., Fable I., Book III., Fable I., Book VI., Fable IV., Book VIII., and Fable I., Book IX., the poet treats of the nature and uses of Fable.

P. 144, n. 4. Æsop.

P. 145, n. 5. Æsop.

P. 146, n. 6. Faerno.

P. 147, n. 7. *Hospital of Fools, i. e., madhouse.*

P. 148, n. 8. Æsop; Faerno.

P. 149, n. 9. Æsop.

P. 150, n. 10. Æsop.

P. 152, n. 11. Æsop; also in Faerno.

P. 154, n. 12. Æsop.

P. 155, n. 13. Phædrus, iv. 22.

P. 155, n. 14. *The war, etc.* — The war of the Gods and Titans (sons of Heaven and Earth); *vide* Hesiod, Theogony, i. 1083, Bohn's ed.

P. 156, n. 15. Æsop.

P. 157, n. 16. Æsop; and others.

P. 157, n. 17. Æsop.

- P. 158, n. 18. Æsop; also Faerno.
- P. 159, n. 19. Æsop.
- P. 160, n. 20. Phædrus, book iv. 8; also Æsop.
- P. 163, n. 21. Avianus; also Verdizotti.
- P. 163, n. 22. *Wisdom's bird*. — The owl was the bird of Minerva, as the eagle was that of Jupiter.
- P. 165, n. 23. Abstemi-
us.
- P. 166, n. 24. Versions will be found in Æsop, Avianus, and Abstemi-
us.
- P. 166, n. 25. *Old Dindenaut*. — *Vide* Rabelais, Pantagruel, Book IV. chap. viii. — TRANSLATOR.
- The character in Rabelais is a sheep-stealer as well as a sheep-dealer.
- P. 167, n. 26. According to Philip de Commines, the Emperor Frederic III. of Germany used a story conveying the substance of this fable, with its moral of *Never sell your bear-skin till the beast is dead*, as his sole reply to the ambassadors of the French king when that monarch sent him proposals for dividing between them the provinces of the Duke of Burgundy. The meaning of which was, says de Commines, 'That if the King came according to his promise, they would take the Duke, if they could; and when he was taken, they would talk of dividing his dominions.' — *Vide* Bohn's edition of the 'Memoirs of de Commines,' vol. i. p. 246.
- P. 168, n. 27. Æsop and Avianus.
- P. 168, n. 28. *Martin*. — Martin-bâton, again as in Fable V., Book IV.

BOOK VI.

Page 169, note 1. Æsop.

P. 170, n. 2. *A certain Greek*. — Gabrias. — LA FONTAINE. This is Babrias, the Greek fabulist, to whom La

Fontaine gives the older form of his name. La Fontaine's strictures on this 'rival' of Æsop proceed from the fact that he read the author in the corrupted form of the edition by Ignatius Magister (ninth century). It was not till a century after La Fontaine wrote that the fame of Babrias was cleared by Bentley and Tyrwhitt, who brought his Fables to light in their original form.

P. 171, n. 3. *Master-author, etc.* — The 'master-author' is Æsop; the rival, Gabrias, or Babrias. The last line refers the reader to the following fable for the comparison. In the original editions of La Fontaine, the two fables appear together with the heading, 'Fables I. et II.'

P. 171, n. 4. Gabrias, or Babrias; and Æsop. See note to preceding fable.

P. 172, n. 5. Æsop and Lokman; also P. Hegemon.

P. 174, n. 6. Æsop; and Faerno.

P. 176, n. 7. Abstemius.

P. 178, n. 8. Æsop; also Faerno.

P. 180, n. 9. Æsop.

P. 180, n. 10. Phædrus, i. 15.

P. 181, n. 11. Æsop; also Phædrus, i. 12.

P. 182, n. 12. Æsop; also Lokman.

P. 183, n. 13. *Hellebore.* — The ancient remedy for insanity.

P. 183, n. 14. *Kalends of the Greeks.* — The Greeks, unlike the Romans, had no kalends in their computation of time, hence the frequent use of this expression to convey the idea of an indefinite period of time.

P. 184, n. 15. Æsop.

P. 185, n. 16. There is another fable with this title, viz., Fable XXIV., Book XII. This fable in its earlier form will be found in Phædrus, i. 6.

P. 186, n. 17. Æsop; also Phædrus, iv. 18.

P. 188, n. 18. Æsop.

P. 189, n. 19. Abstemi^{us}, 3.

P. 190, n. 20. Æsop.

P. 191, n. 21. Æsop; also Phædrus, i. 4.

P. 191, n. 22. Avianus; also Faerno; also Rabelais, book iv., ch. 23, Bohn's edition.

P. 193, n. 23. Abstemi^{us}.

P. 194, n. 24. *Steed of the Arcadian breed.* — An ass, as in Fable XVII., Book VIII.

P. 196, n. 25. La Fontaine, gentle reader, does not mean to say that Discord lodges with all married people, but that the foul fiend is never better satisfied than when she can find such accommodation. — TRANSLATOR.

P. 197, n. 26. Abstemi^{us}.

P. 200, n. 27. *Her spouse.* — Cupid, the spouse of Psyche. The 'other work on my hands' mentioned in this Epilogue (the end of the poet's first collection of Fables) was no doubt the writing of his 'Psyche,' which was addressed to his patron, the Duchess de Bouillon, and published in 1659, the year following the publication of the first six Books of the Fables. See also Translator's Preface.



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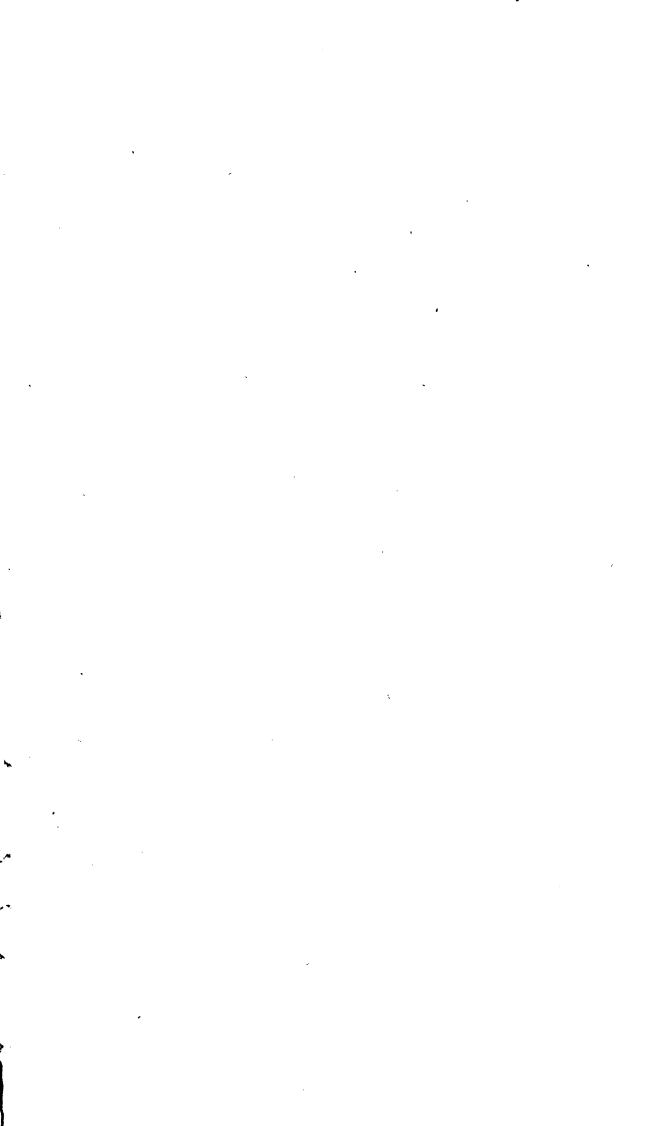
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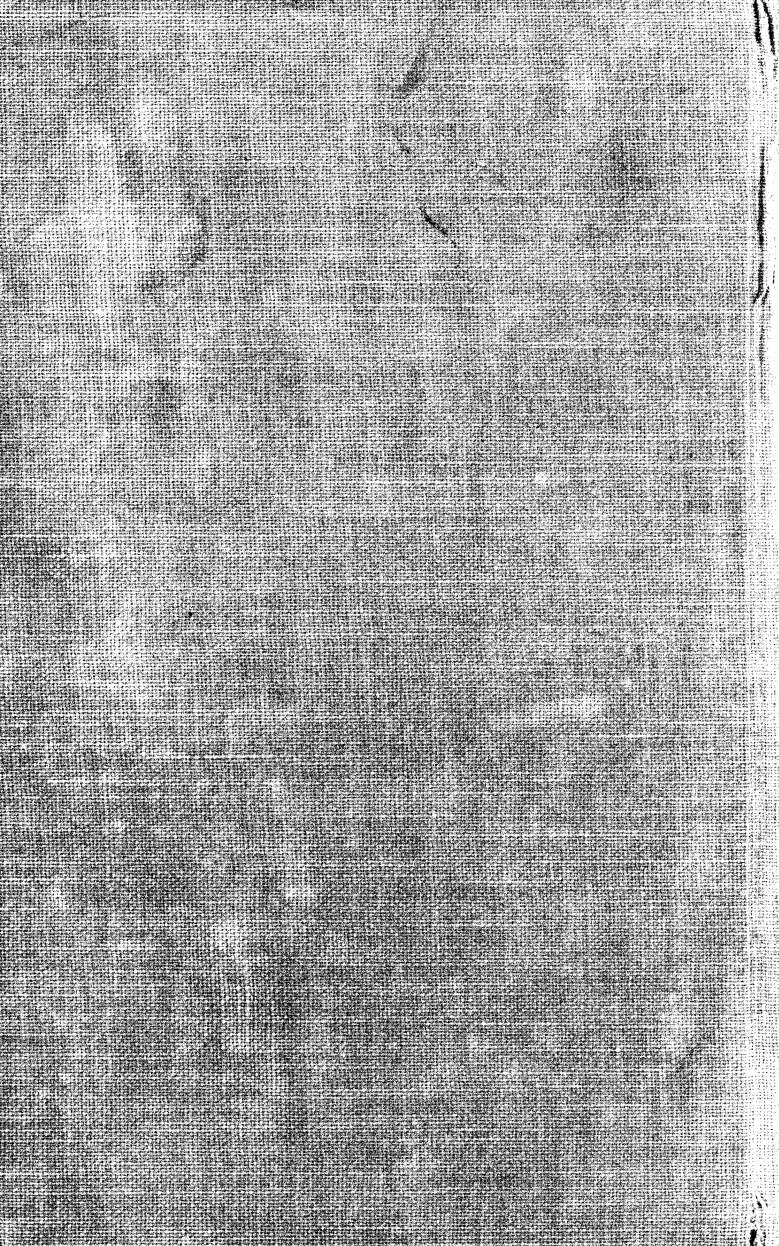
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